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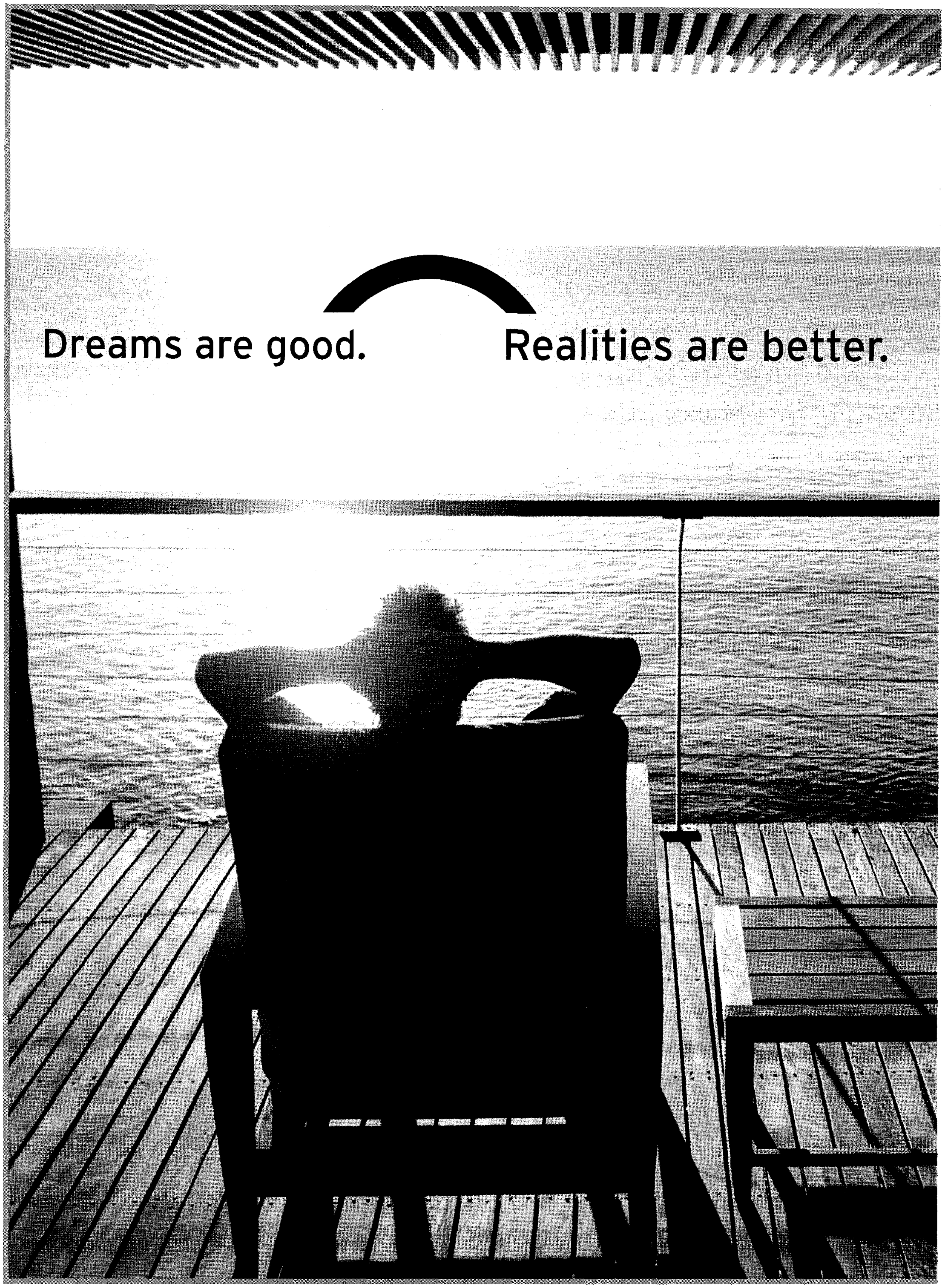
SEPT. 3 & 10, 2007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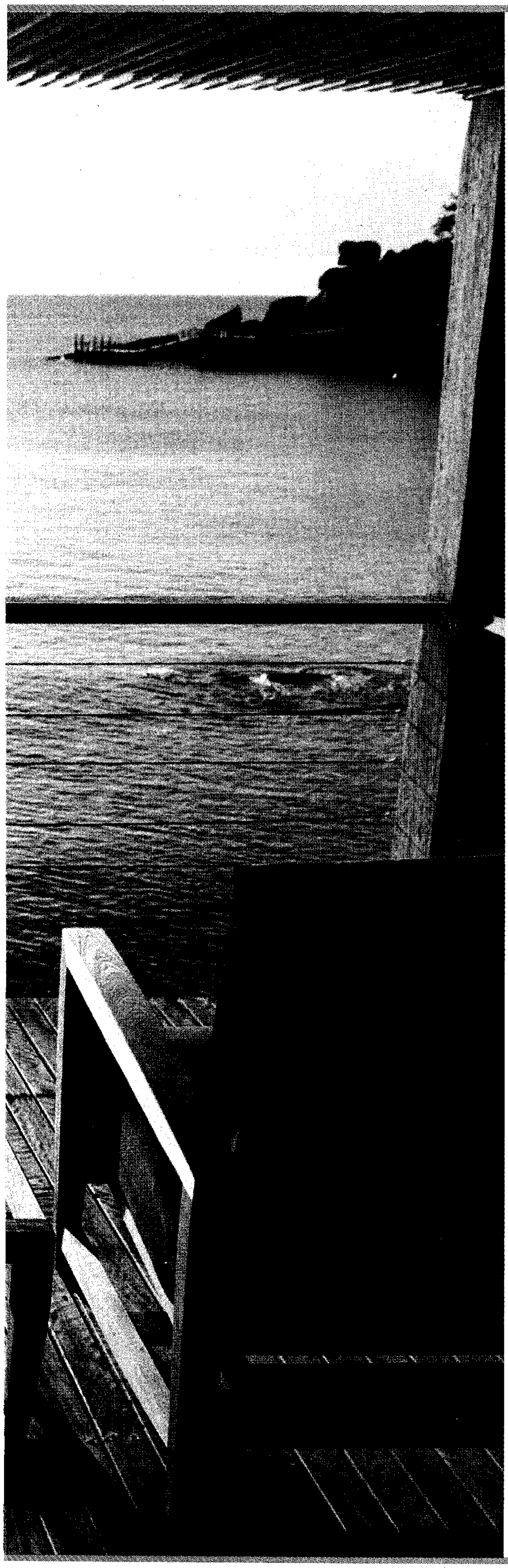

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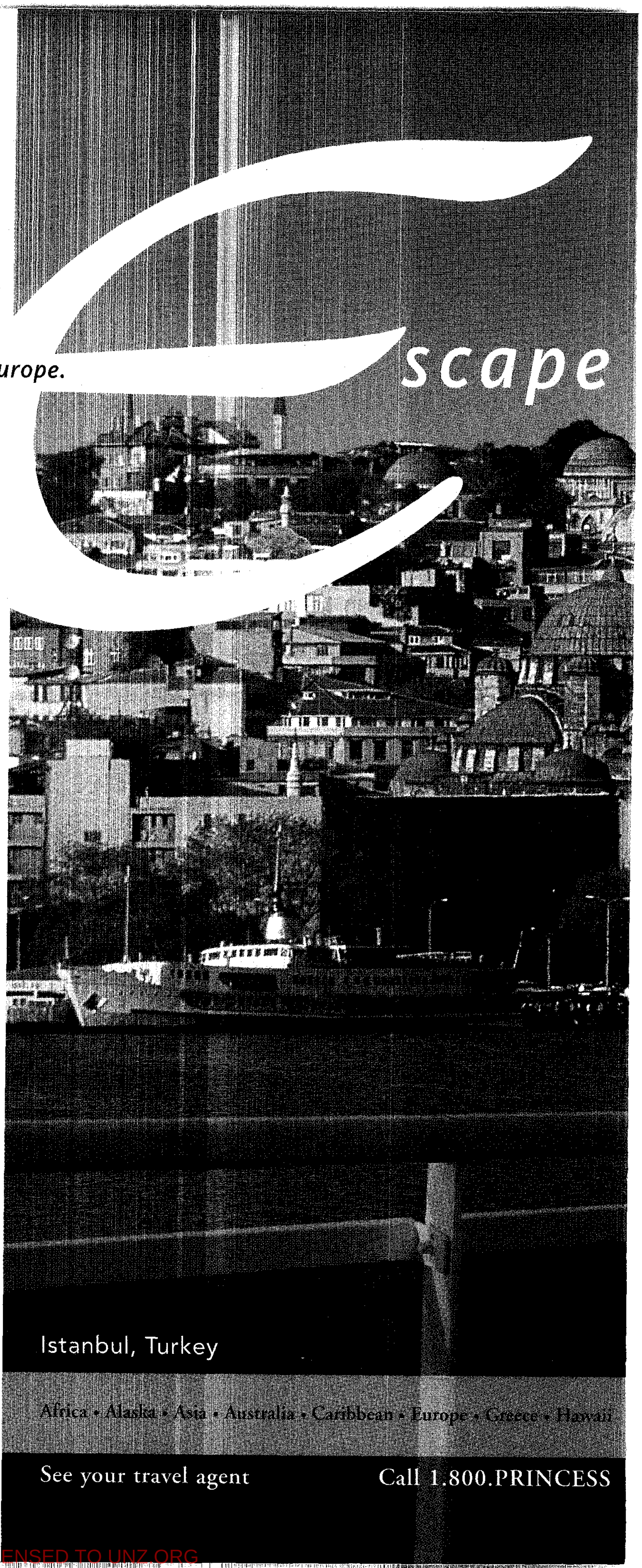

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THE NEW YORKER
THE FOOD ISSUE

SEPTEMBER 3 & 10, 2007

12 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
39 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
David Remnick on the Israel lobby;
James Surowiecki on airline woes.

Calvin Trillin 48 SINGAPORE JOURNAL
Three Chopsticks
A search for the island's best street food.
Adam Gopnik 60 ANNALS OF AGRICULTURE
New York Local
Fruits of the five boroughs.
Judith Thurman 72 OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS
The Fast Lane
Submitting to a regime of hunger.
John McPhee 82 PERSONAL HISTORY
My Life List
A world of weird eats.
Jane Kramer 94 LETTER FROM EUROPE
Spice Routes
Claudia Roden's kitchen.
Patrick Radden Keefe 106 A REPORTER AT LARGE
The Jefferson Bottles
How much rare old wine can one man find?
Lara Vapnyar 118 FICTION
"Luda and Milena"

FAMILY DINNER

Aleksandar Hemon 58 Rationed
Gary Shteyngart 70 Sixty-nine Cents
Nell Freudenberger 80 Grandmother's House
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 92 Real Food
David Sedaris 98 Tasteless
Anthony Lane 104 Choke
Donald Antrim 112 A Man in the Kitchen

THE CRITICS
BOOKS

Joan Acocella 126 *Dante's Paradiso.*
133 Briefly Noted

Continued on page 6

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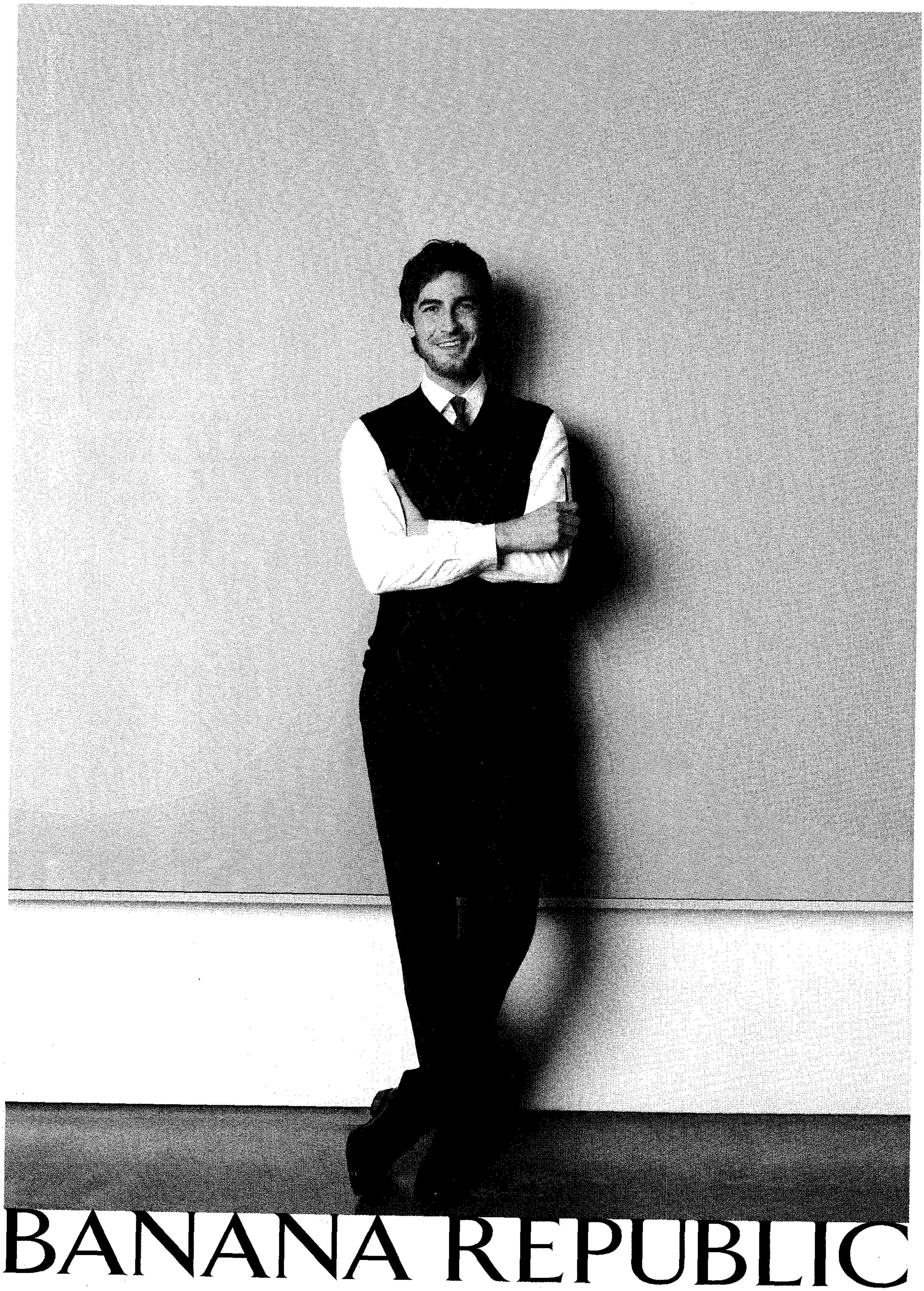

BANANA REPUBLIC

Nancy Franklin 134 ON TELEVISION
"Californication," "Tell Me You Love Me."

Sasha Frere-Jones 136 POP MUSIC
Manu Chao's global vision.

Hilton Als 140 THE THEATRE
"A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Iphigenia 2.0."

David Denby 142 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"The Nanny Diaries," "3:10 to Yuma."

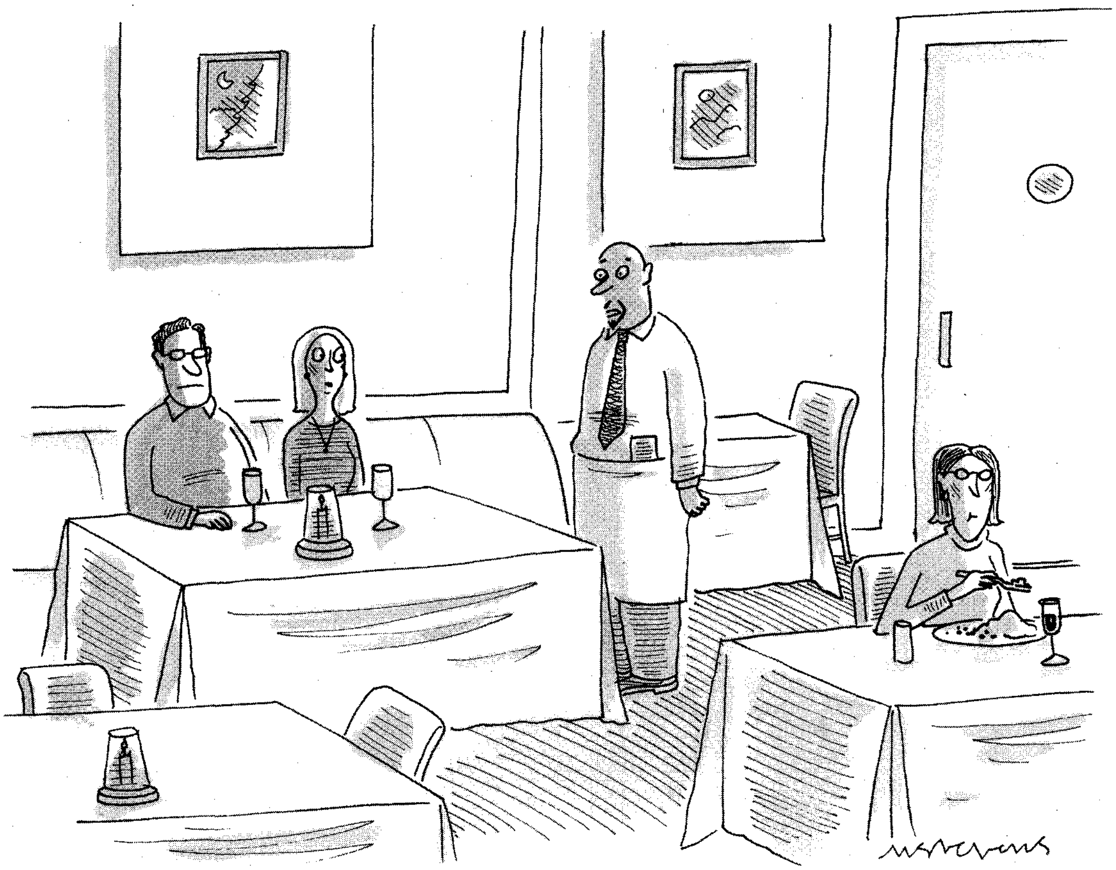
POEMS

James Richardson 100 "End of Summer"
Jean Valentine 114 "Ghost Elephants"

Wayne Thiebaud COVER
"Menu Rose"

DRAWINGS *Mick Stevens, Edward Koren, Sidney Harris, Alex Gregory, Carolita Johnson, Charles Barsotti, Gahan Wilson, Jack Ziegler, Matthew Diffee, Tom Cheney, William Haefeli, Michael Crawford, Robert Weber, Victoria Roberts, Jason Patterson, P. C. Vey, Roz Chast, Danny Shanahan, Nick Downes, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Barbara Smaller, Mike Twohy, Paul Noth*

SPOTS *Philippe Petit-Roulet*



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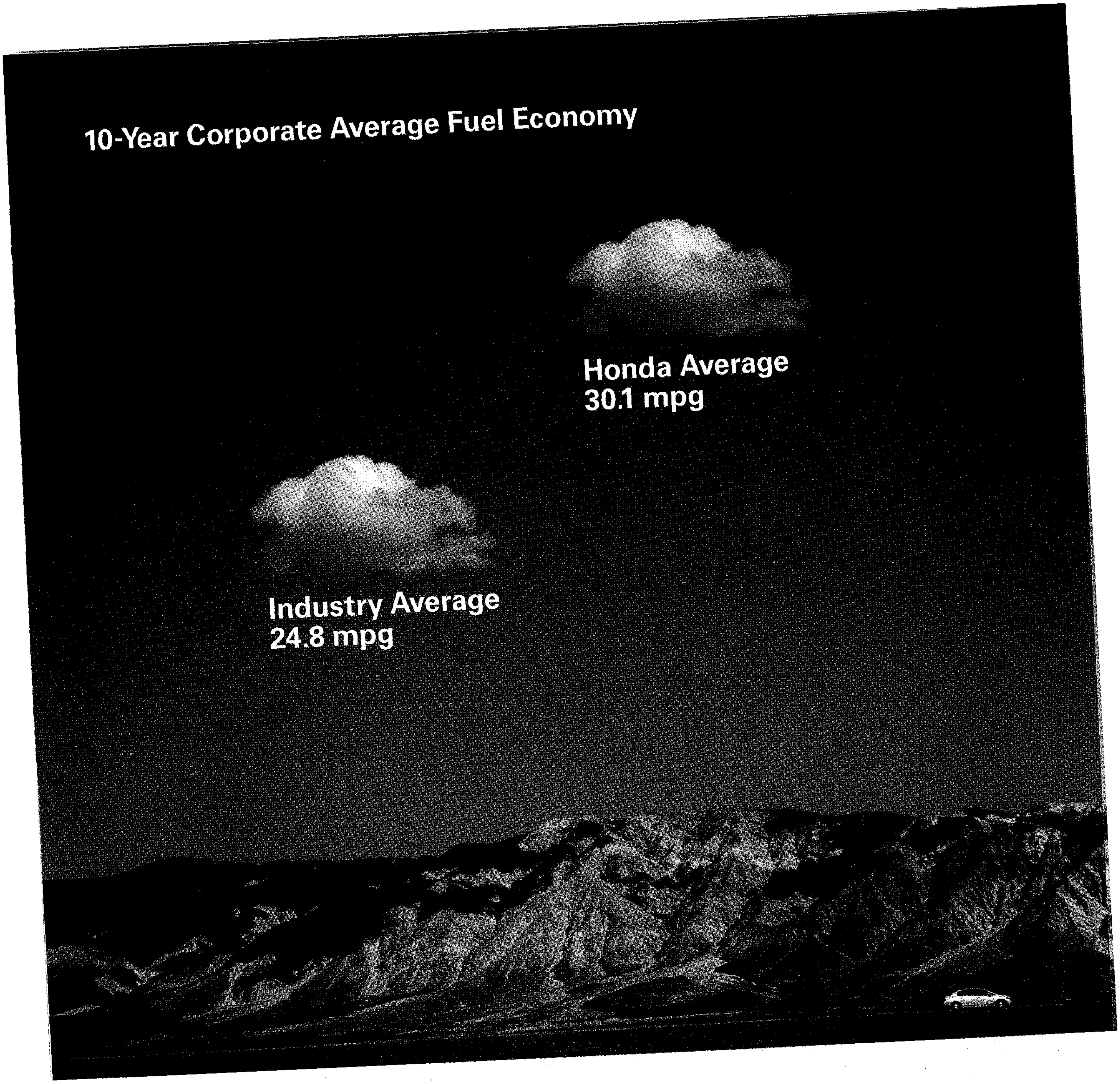
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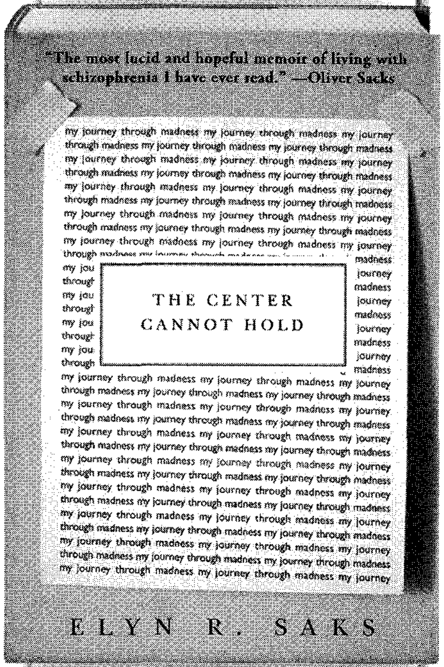
—OLIVER SACKS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my journey through madness
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ELYN R. SAKS

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—*Library Journal*

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"A beacon of hope."
—Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Demon*

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Kramer ("Spice Routes," p. 94) writes the Letter from Europe for the magazine.

Calvin Trillin ("Three Chopsticks," p. 48) has written several books about eating, including "The Tummy Trilogy" and "Feeding a Yen: Savoring Local Specialities, from Kansas City to Cuzco."

Aleksandar Hemon ("Rationed," p. 58) is the author of two works of fiction, "The Question of Bruno" and "Nowhere Man."

Judith Thurman ("The Fast Lane," p.72) is a staff writer. Her new book, "Cleopatra's Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire," will be published in October.

Gary Shteyngart ("Sixty-nine Cents," p. 70) has written two novels, "The Russian Debutante's Handbook" and "Absurdistan," which are available in paperback.

Nell Freudenberger ("Grandmother's House," p. 80) is the author of "Lucky Girls," a collection of short stories, and "The Dissident," a novel.

John McPhee ("My Life List," p. 82) has been contributing to the magazine since 1963. His latest book, "Uncommon Carriers," is out in paperback.

Patrick Radden Keefe ("The Jefferson Bottles," p. 106) is a fellow at the Century Foundation and the author of "Chatter: Dispatches from the Secret World of Global Eavesdropping."

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ("Real Food," p. 92) published her second novel, "Half of a Yellow Sun," last fall.

David Sedaris ("Tasteless," p. 98) is a regular contributor.

Anthony Lane ("Choke," p. 104) is a film critic for the magazine.

Donald Antrim ("A Man in the Kitchen," p. 112) has written three novels and a memoir, "The Afterlife."

Lara Vapnyar (Fiction, p. 118) is the author of "Memoirs of a Muse," a novel.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 126) writes about literature and dance for the magazine. "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints" is her latest book.

Wayne Thiebaud (Cover) will have a retrospective of seventy years of his work at the Laguna Art Museum, in Laguna Beach, in October. There will also be an exhibit at the Paul Thiebaud Gallery, in New York, in November.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Claudia Roden's orange-and-almond cake and more recipes, plus an audio interview with *Jane Kramer.* / *Cristina Henríquez* remembers *sancocho* at lunchtime in Panama. / Daily commentary on the U.S. Open, by *Nick Paumgarten* and *John Colapinto.* / Blogs by *George Packer, Dana Goodyear,* and *Hendrik Hertzberg.* / Eight decades of *New Yorker* food covers. / From the archives: *John Bainbridge* on the auction of the Jefferson bottles, *Tim Parks* on Dante, and thousands of reviews in the Film File. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.

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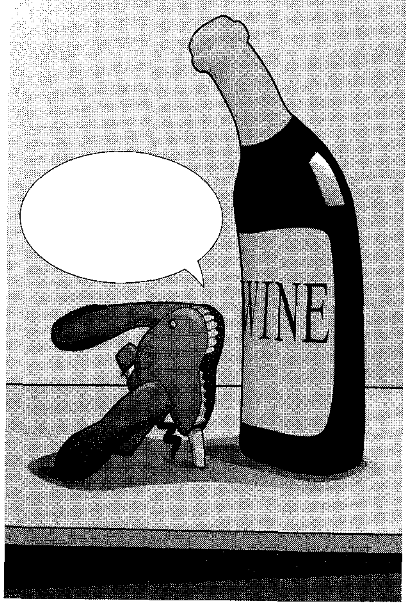
What did the Rabbit say to the wine bottle?



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THE MAIL

NATURAL BEES

Elizabeth Kolbert, in her piece about honeybees and "colony-collapse disorder," details the mysterious disease that has caused a number of hives to be lost ("Stung," August 6th). In my experience as a beekeeper, those who practice beekeeping more naturally experience significantly fewer problems than most industrial beekeepers. Perhaps this is because continuously forcing honeybees to perform in order to fulfill agri-industrial needs is no more sustainable than industrial agriculture itself, which is based on mono-cropping combined with the input of lots of petrochemicals and petro-fuels. Destroying natural landscapes may have reduced honeybees' inherent ability to nutritionally maintain healthy immune systems—and maintaining them on corn syrup or sugar water and nutritional supplements doesn't help. The same goes for humans, but, in our continuing denial of what it means to be part of a larger environment and ecosystem, it's always the creatures least able to adapt that die off first.

Ernest J. P. Muhly
Walkersville, Md.

FREEING THE PRESS

Steve Coll, in his Comment on Rupert Murdoch's recent purchase of the *Wall Street Journal*, mentions the unique ownership of the St. Petersburg *Times*, writing that those families who own other newspapers "might still preserve their newsrooms' independence by converting them into nonprofit foundations, similar to what the Poynter family did" (The Talk of the Town, August 13th). There are two important clarifications I'd like to add. First, it was not a family but a man—Nelson Poynter—who found a way to keep his newspaper independent. Indeed, his profound mistrust of family entanglements, especially in successive generations, was primary in his thinking. Second, this newspaper remains a privately held, for-profit company that pays taxes on its profits and pays dividends to its owner, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. The Poynter Institute, a school for journalists, is a nonprofit. Poynter intended to preserve the independence of his newspaper and also to improve journalism through training for its practitioners. Since his death, in 1978, the St. Petersburg *Times* has become the largest newspaper in Florida, and the Poynter Institute has become a vital resource for journalists. In creating this structure, Poynter did something remarkable: he gave away his life's work. That act is a measure of his commitment to independent journalism, and a reason that this ownership structure is likely to remain quite rare.

Paul Tash
Editor and Chairman
St. Petersburg Times
St. Petersburg, Fla.

IN-BOX POETRY

Michael Specter's account of the annoying and ultimately expensive war on spam leaves out one humorous aspect of receiving a deluge of these unsolicited e-mails: the bizarre use of names and language ("Damn Spam," August 6th). I've often been struck by the strange and poetic pairing of words and names attached to a spam e-mail, obviously a product of a computer program's randomized imagination, if you can call it that. I've written some of them down through the years. Names like Cornelius Decker and Mildred Mercado, and subject lines like "Carcass Overdue," "Banking Connote," "Extortionate Treble," and "Intensity Salmon," sometimes give me more reading pleasure than my word-a-day e-mails.

Jeremy Green
New York City

•

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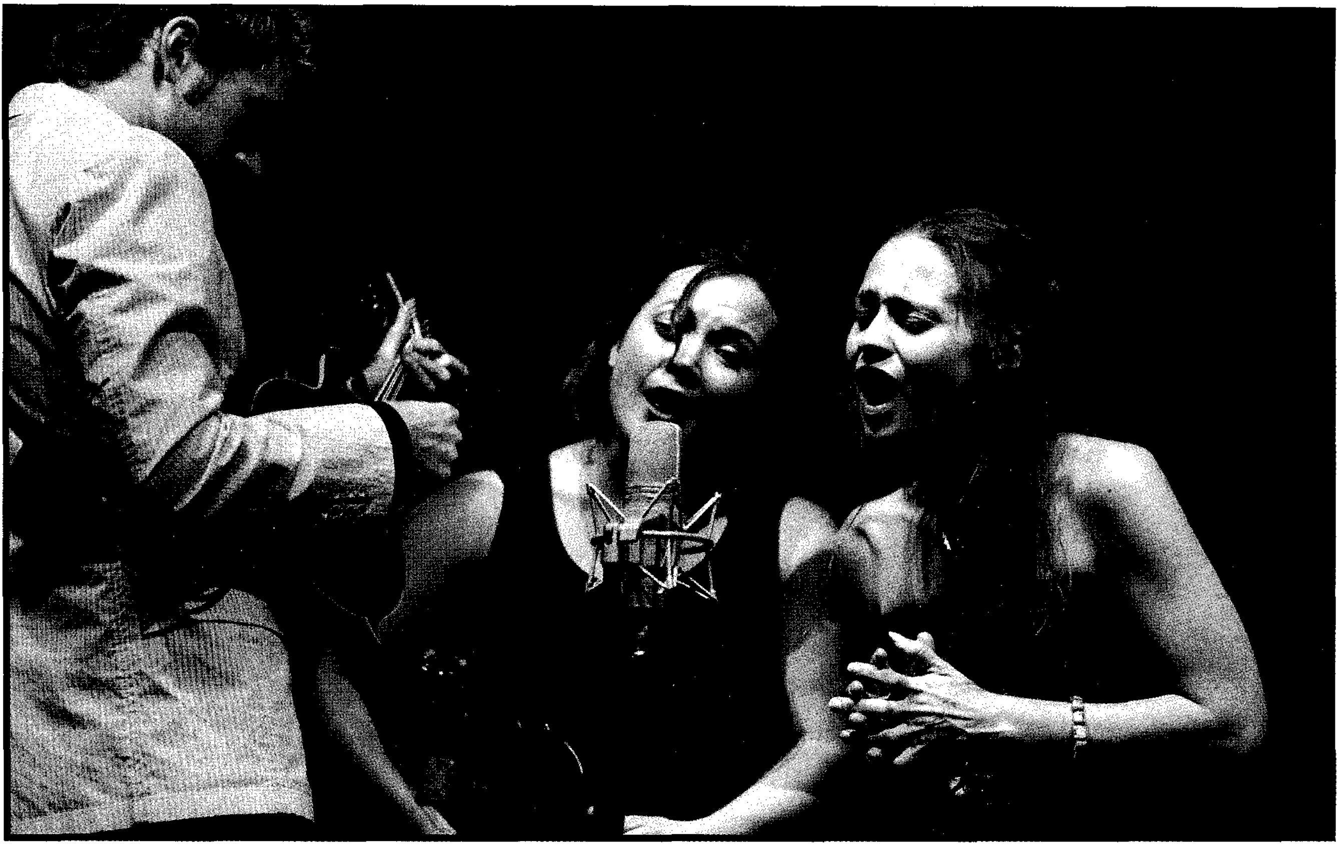

Nickel Creek and Fiona Apple, performing together in Central Park. Photograph by Lauren Carton.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
WELL VERSED

"Edge," a one-woman play about the life of Sylvia Plath, written and directed by Paul Alexander (who wrote a biography of Plath in 1991), is reprised at the ArcLight Theatre. Angelica Torn, the daughter of the actors Rip Torn and Geraldine Page, portrays the last day in the life of the poet—who famously suffered from depression and who endured a difficult marriage to the English poet Ted Hughes before committing suicide, in 1963. (See page 17.)

NIGHT LIFE
WORLD BEAT

Global Rhythm magazine, a trusted source for music from all points of the compass, celebrates its fifteenth anniversary with a show at the Highline Ballroom that features the sitarist and vocalist Anoushka Shankar (the daughter of Ravi Shankar and the half sister of Norah Jones), the percussionist and d.j. Karsh Kale, and others. (See page 18.)

ART
VACUUM PACKED

An inconspicuous door in an abandoned building on the Lower East Side opens onto "A Psychic Vacuum," a labyrinthine installation—and the first major American project—by the British artist Mike Nelson, who was short-listed for the Turner Prize in 2007. (See page 25.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPEN HOUSE

New York City Opera's "Opera-for-All" series—three special performances held in advance of opening night—lives up to the company's populist premise, giving audiences a reasonably priced sneak peek at the season's varied offerings. (See page 26.)

MOVIES
READY, AIM, SHOOT

The collage-like compilations of Santiago Alvarez, the epic documentaries of Patricio Guzmán (including "The Battle of Chile," about the 1973 military coup), and Fernando Solanas's "The Hour of the Furnaces," from 1968, are among the cinema's most potent works of political advocacy. Anthology Film Archives offers films from this trio. (See page 34.)

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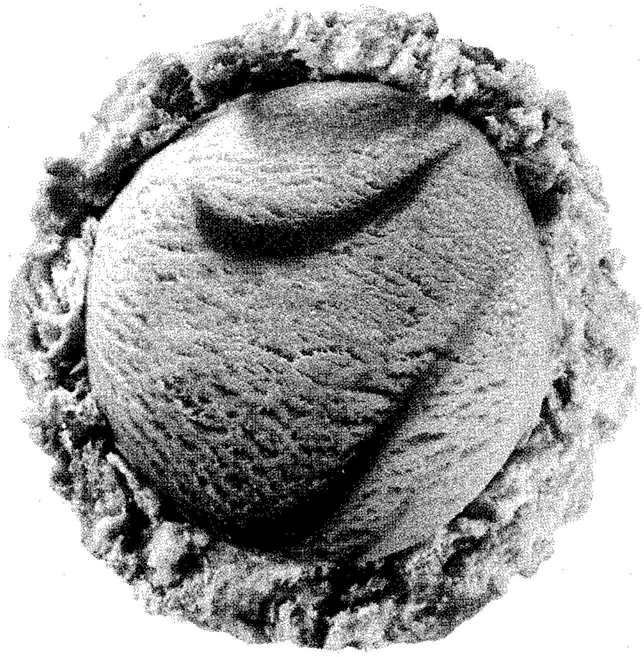

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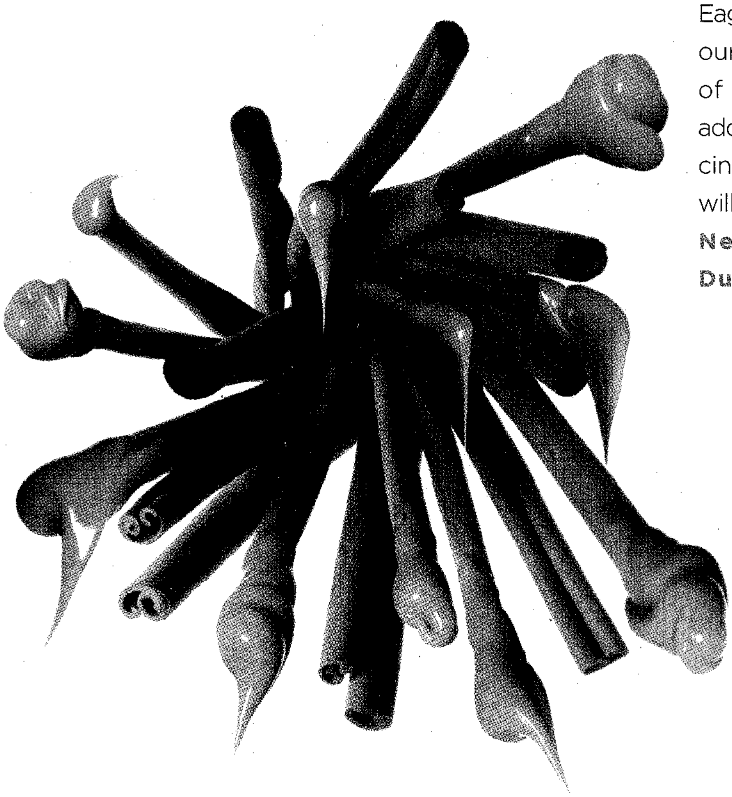

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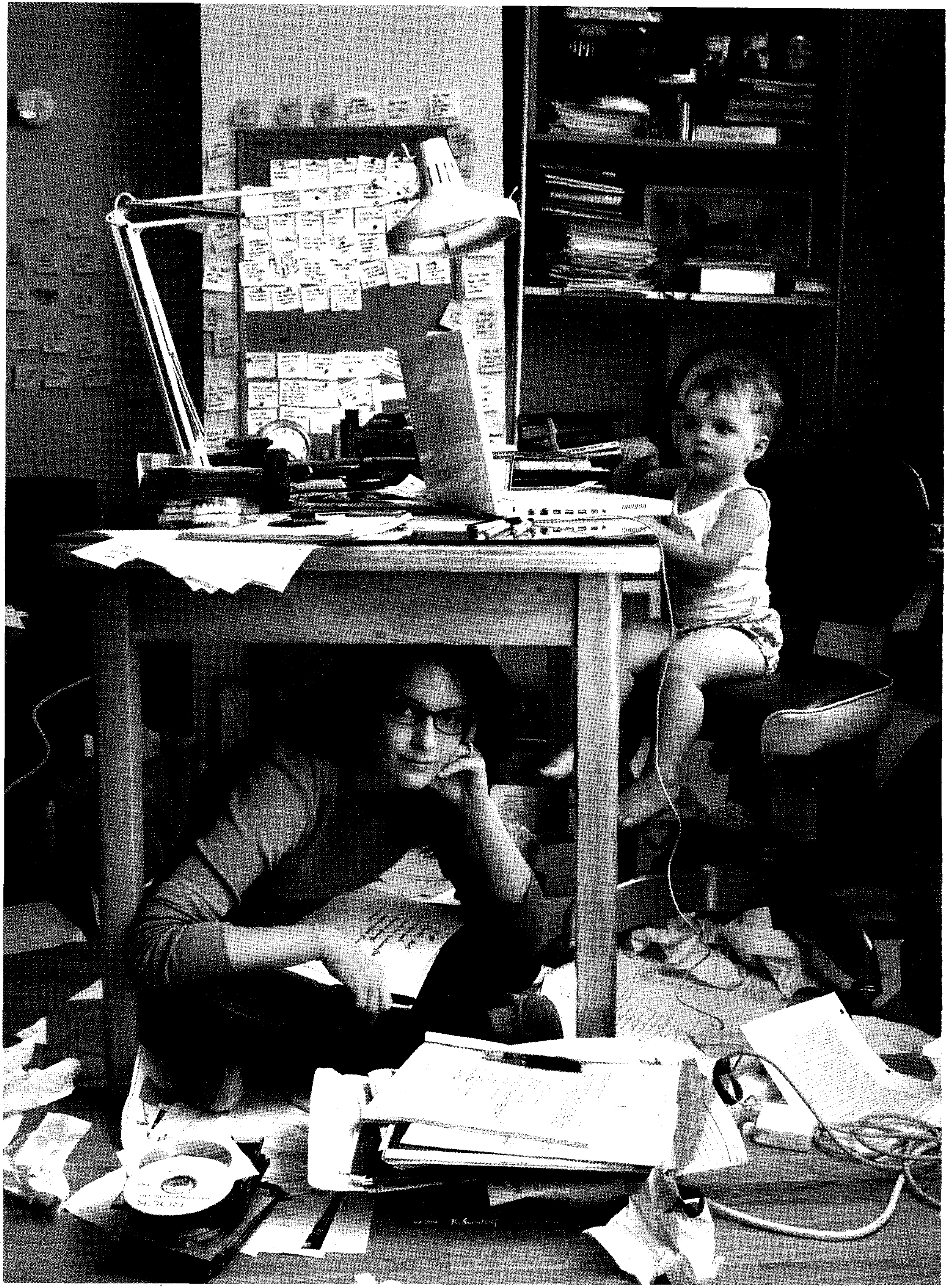

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AMERICA LOVESEXDEATH
Billy the Mime is the creator and star of this show, a series of sketches about current events. In previews. Opens Sept. 6. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE DINING ROOM
The Keen Company opens its season with A. R. Gurney's drama, a series of vignettes about a twentieth-century Wasp family. Jonathan Silverstein directs. Previews begin Sept. 11. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

EDGE
Angelica Torn stars in this one-woman show about the life of Sylvia Plath. Paul Alexander wrote and directs. Previews begin Sept. 4. Opens Sept. 9. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-352-3101.)

100 SAINTS YOU SHOULD KNOW
Playwrights Horizons kicks off the season with the world première of a play by Kate Fodor, about a woman who becomes intrigued by a troubled priest at the church that she cleans. Janel Moloney, Lois Smith, Jeremy Shamos, Will Rogers, and Zoe Kazan star. Ethan McSweeny directs. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

KING LEAR
Royal Shakespeare Company brings its production of the tragedy, starring Ian McKellen and directed by Trevor Nunn, to BAM. Playing in repertory with "The Seagull." Opens Sept. 6. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THE POWER OF DARKNESS
Mint Theatre Company revives Leo Tolstoy's drama from 1886, about a Russian peasant who becomes involved in a murder. Previews begin Sept. 6. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

PURPLE HEARTS
Burgess Clark's drama about the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack, directed by David Epstein. Previews begin Sept. 5. Opens Sept. 8. (Gene Frankel Theatre, 24 Bond St. 212-387-8440.)

RITES OF PRIVACY
David Rhodes wrote this one-man show, in which he portrays numerous characters, including a Southern pageant queen and a Nazi refugee. In previews. Opens Aug. 30. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

ROCK DOVES
The première of a drama by Marie Jones, set in postwar Northern Ireland. Ian McElhinney directs. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444.)

SCARCITY
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the première of a new play by Lucy Thurber, about siblings longing to escape their life of poverty. Previews begin Aug. 29. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE SEAGULL
Royal Shakespeare Company brings its production of Chekhov's drama, directed by Trevor Nunn, to BAM. Ian McKellen stars in select performances. Playing in repertory with "King Lear." Opens Sept. 7. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THE SHAPE OF METAL
Origin Theatre Company presents Thomas Kilroy's drama, in which a sculptor copes with the disappearance of her daughter. Brian Murray directs. Previews begin Sept. 8. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

TILL THE BREAK OF DAWN
Danny Hoch's new hip-hop play, about a group of South Bronx radicals who take a trip to Havana, Cuba. Previews begin Sept. 4. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

WALMARTOPIA! THE MUSICAL
Daniel Goldstein directs this musical comedy, about a Wal-Mart employee who wakes up in the year 2037, when Wal-Mart rules the world. With a book by Catherine Capellaro and music and lyrics by Andrew Rohn. In previews. Opens Sept. 3. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

THE ALL-AMERICAN SPORT OF BIPARTISAN BASHING
"For political comedians, George W. Bush is pure gold," quips Will Durst, a craggy-faced, avuncular fellow who's been doing standup satire for decades (the show's opening video montage is Durst appearing on every TV news outlet since the age of the dinosaurs). Nowadays, he's perfected a verbal jitterbug of comedy and commentary, taking on politics, war, and rhetoric in an age of declining democracy. Some of his best lines are direct quotes, lifted from Bush's speeches: "I think we can all agree that the past is over." Though the Democratic candidates come in for a few obligatory knocks, with Hillary taking the lion's share, Durst considers them too lacklustre to excoriate. He saves his astringent best for the current regime, counting out the casualties. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAIR GAME
Karl Gajdusek's sharp Machiavellian electoral drama explores a world where sex, power, feminism, and the public trust are all up for grabs. Karen Werthman is a governor on the rise, who may yet become America's first woman President. Her controlling campaign manager, Miranda (a smartly sexy Caralyn Kozlowski), is riding high on adrenaline, until Simon—the governor's son, a professor—is publicly slapped with a statutory-rape charge. His affair with a student will destroy his mother's hopes, unless they can figure out a way to milk the scandal for media time. Gajdusek's writing is taut, and his characters are often too smart for their own good, though they are compulsively watchable. Under the guidance of the director, Andrew Volkoff, the cast nails each psychological twist in this winsome, wicked play. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Sept. 7.)

GONE MISSING
The Civilians' documentary-theatre piece, based on interviews conducted by the troupe and compiled by Steven Cosson, captures the funny and inescapably poignant details that emerge when you ask people about the things they've lost, like a shoe, body parts, memory, a Palm Pilot dropped in the panic of 9/11. The stories are punctuated by genre-hopping songs by Michael Friedman, and the actors—six of them, in snappy gray suits—provide evocative characterizations in quick succession, insuring that the variations-on-a-theme approach never gets old. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

GREASE
It is not generally advisable to cast Broadway musicals via reality television, but that was the thinking behind this revival, which found its Danny and Sandy through the NBC series "Grease: You're the One That I Want!" The contest winners, Max Crumm and Laura Osnes, don't resemble flesh-and-blood performers so much as statistical inevitabilities, especially alongside their fellow T-Birds and Pink Ladies, who are played by actual professional actors. (Matthew Saldívar, in particular, finds previously untapped nuance in the role of Kenickie.) For the most part, though, the director, Kathleen Marshall, has created a nearly foolproof vehicle for the pair, packing much of the storytelling into the musical numbers to compensate for the strikingly underwritten book. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

IPHIGENIA 2.0
Signature Theatre Company opens the season with the New York première of a play by Charles Mee. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

LONG DISTANCE
Three short plays are based on stories by Judy Budnitz, including "Skin Care," "Visitors," and "Flush." Directed by Bridgette Dunlap and Alexis Grausz. (Chashama, 217 E. 42nd St. 212-868-4444. Through Sept. 1.)

TABLES FOR TWO
HILL COUNTRY

30 W. 26th St. (212-255-4544)—Earlier this year, the Texas House of Representatives passed Resolution 2959, which declared that "by sharing the culinary tradition of his hometown and state," Marc Glosserman, Hill Country's owner, "is certain to please homesick Texans and hungry New Yorkers alike." Indeed, on a recent evening, this barbecue palace was filled with hungry New Yorkers, mostly young men in baseball caps and khaki pants, who were acting like homesick Texans: getting boisterously drunk on Lone Star, the "National Beer of Texas." Others, reluctant to mitigate their Northern impatience with Southern congeniality, were kicking up a fuss. A pair of stately silver-haired gentlemen—accompanied by their twin-set-and-pearls-wearing wives—were complaining to the hostess about the mayhem at the door. "The place is modelled after a meat market in Lockhart," she drawled. "Maybe it's a little harder to handle here, but it's how we do it in Texas."

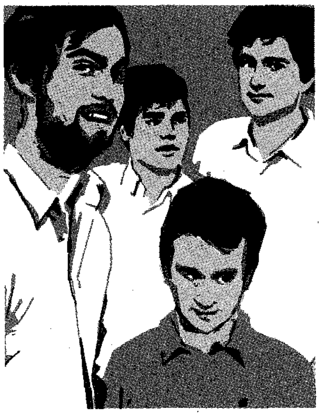
Taking the Kreuz Market model—where patrons buy barbecue by the pound, grab a few other provisions, and enjoy a quick meal—and applying it to a bi-level restaurant, with two bars and a performance stage, does create problems. After you fight through the scrum to put your name on a list, finally receive your "meal ticket" (on which countermen mark your order), get to your seat, and take in the instructions—no plates, cocktail service only, a fifty-buck fine if you lose your ticket—you stand in line for meat, and again for sides, and once more for drinks. The last and the shortest line is the cashier's. One senses that the place is all hat and no cattle.

But then the cattle come home: dry-rubbed and smoked for nearly a day, until the meat is juicy, salty, and spicy—sans sauce, Texas-style. The "brisket moist" and the pork spareribs are especially savory, and the beef ribs are huge and pink and plead for unseemly gnawing. For the timorous, the beer-can game hen is succulent, if a little boring; you're left pondering the advantages of cooking with a beer can. Conversation is discouraged, most nights, by the raucous live acts, including, not long ago, CBS News's Bob Schieffer, who was fronting the D.C.-based band Honky Tonk Confidential. Sample lyrics: "Excuse me, bud, before you intrude. I ain't some 'Brokeback Mountain' dude." Maybe the music ought to be left to Texas. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Meats $6.50-$29 by the pound.)

—Mike Peed

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FULL OF GRACE

The four recent Columbia University graduates who make up Vampire Weekend describe their style as "Upper West Side Soweto." Paul Simon's "Graceland" has been, until now, the working definition of Upper West Side Soweto, but



twenty-somethings must be making rougher and stranger music, right? Not really. Vampire Weekend is the first band to pick up where Simon left off, combining various Afro-pop forms with Western book learning. The band makes sunny, almost weightless music and is confident enough to play without noise or volume. The guitarist and singer Ezra Koenig makes references both to a background of privilege (arguments about punctuation, a trip to Dharamsala, and Benetton, a label so out of fashion no rapper would dare name-check it) and to things teen-agers anywhere might recognize (reggaetón and the hip-hop artist Lil Jon). I've seen people born after "Graceland" dancing at Vampire Weekend shows. The band plays at the Music Hall of Williamsburg on Sept. 8.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Daniel Sullivan directs Shakespeare in the Park's second production of the season. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750. Through Sept. 9.)

MOSCOW CATS THEATRE
With the voluptuousness of a Ziegfeld Follies soubrette, a white Persian cat hangs from an upholstered moon, suspended from a high wire. When a Russian ballerina dances onto the stage, the cat's powder-puff tail twitches in time to the music, as if it's the most natural thing to be swinging across a circus stage. There are thirty-five feline performers (and one canine) in the company: they negotiate high wires on their paws, scamper up poles, twirl atop disco balls, ride motorized cars, and hang upside down from parallel bars. There's even a Siamese who sings "Happy Birthday" on cue. An amiable quintet of human clowns communicate effortlessly with their scene-stealing quadruped companions. Essentially, this is an old-fashioned family circus with one difference: the lion's share of the company has sharp claws and modest financial expectations. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-307-7171.)

NEVA SMALL: NOT QUITE AN INGENUE
The actress presents a one-woman show about her life. (Actors' Temple Theatre, 339 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SHATTERING OF THE GOLDEN PANE
In this new drama by Le Wilhelm, two outsiders meet in an abandoned church. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Sept. 2.)

SUMMER SHORTS
A festival of nine new one-act plays, including works by Warren Leight, Skip Kennon, and Tina Howe. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Aug. 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Charles Busch and Julie Halston reprise their roles in Busch's comedy "The Lady in Question," directed by Christopher Ashley ("Xanadu"), through Sept. 2. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
"Mrs. Warren's Profession," directed by Anders Cato, closes Sept. 1, and "Educating Rita," directed by Richard Corley, continues its run. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, "As You Like It," directed by Kurt Rhoads, closes Sept. 2. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY
Among the many offerings at this theatre complex in the Berkshires is "Antony and Cleopatra," starring Tina Packer and Nigel Gore. Through Sept. 2. For more information, visit www.shakespeare.org. (Lenox, Mass. 413-637-3353.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MASKED:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **OPUS:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Sept. 1. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **33 TO NOTHING:** Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101. **TINGS DEY HAPPEN:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **TOM CREAN: ANTARCTIC EXPLORER:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Sept. 9. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

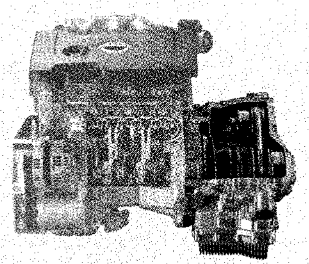
BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 30: **Mark Olson,** the co-founder of the Jayhawks, has an intensely personal new solo album, "The Salvation Blues." Aug. 31: *Royal Flush*, an underground music-and-art magazine, presents **Clutch.** This Maryland outfit is difficult to categorize; its metallic, riff-heavy rock is brainy yet burly. With **Beatallica,** a novelty act that grinds Beatles songs up in the dark sonics of vintage Metallica. For a one-joke band, however, they do it well, and fans of both influences will be alternately amused and aghast. Sept. 7: A night of silly eighties heavy metal with **Satanicide.**

BROOKLYN COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL
This gathering, which is now in its fourth year, celebrates the back-porch Kings County music scene. It takes traditional Nashville and Bakersfield electrified-honky-tonk aesthetics as a guide but adds a gritty native pulse, influenced by rumbling subway trains, alternate-side-of-the-street parking, and the presence of a few million close neighbors. This year, the festival is taking place Sept. 6-8 at two Brooklyn bars, Buttermilk and Southpaw. There's plenty of music on tap (along with homemade-pie contests each night). (For a complete schedule, visit www.brooklyncountrymusic.com.)

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 5: **Satellite Party** is the latest project from the ex-Jane's Addiction and Porno for Pyros front man and Lollapalooza founder, Perry Farrell. Featuring the former Extreme guitarist Nuno Bettencourt and a fleeting cameo from the New Order bassist Peter Hook, the band's début album, "Ultra Payloaded," is a concept album more or less about an élite coterie of intergalactic visionaries fighting to save the earth from global warming. Satellite Party lacks the propulsive wallop of Farrell's previous projects, but fans of the ambitiously shamanistic singer will invariably overlook that quibble. Sept. 8: The **Ditty Bops** are Abby DeWald and Amanda Barrett, two women from Los Angeles who play cabaret-lite songs that eschew contemporary beats for a happy-days-are-here-again feeling.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Aug. 29: **Anoushka Shankar, Karsh Kale,** and others celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of *Global Rhythm* magazine. Sept. 8: **Blowoff,** which is Bob Mould and Richard Morel. Mould, once a member of the American punk band Hüsker Dü and of the celebrated alternative trio Sugar, took a break from music at the end of the nineties to fulfill his passion for professional wrestling. (No joke: he has served as a consultant to the World Cham-

JEROEN KOOLHAAS



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pionship Wrestling organization.) More recently, he started experimenting with electronic music, swapping guitars for samplers and synthesizers. On Saturday nights once a month, he can be found at the 9:30 Club, in Washington, D.C., spinning records with Morel, a producer who has remixed albums by the Pet Shop Boys, Depeche Mode, New Order, the Killers, and many others.

"LET'S ZYDECO"
Sept. 6: The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana brings in **Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys.** Growing up in the little town of Mamou, Riley played accordion in the band of the legendary fiddler Dewey Balfa. Since forming his own band, he has become a tireless ambassador of Cajun culture. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

LUNA LOUNGE
361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (718-384-7112)—Aug. 29: The all-girl rap trio **Northern State.** Sept. 8: Arizona's **Meat Puppets,** one of the more compelling outfits to emerge from the hardcore underground of the eighties, eschewed the narrow punk-rock rule book and spiced up their frenetic rock with elements of psychedelia, blues, folk, and country-and-Western. After a string of critically received albums, the highly influential band—led by the brothers Curt and Cris Kirkwood—seemed poised to finally break into the mainstream after a critical nod from Nirvana's Kurt Cobain in the early nineties, but the momentum was tragically stifled when Cris developed a debilitating heroin habit. After a decade off, Cris is back with the band for their poignantly titled new album, "Rise to Your Knees."

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Sept. 6: Taking their name from Oliver Cromwell's notoriously puritanical brigade, **New Model Army** rose from the smoldering pyre of British punk in the early days of the Thatcher administration. The group combined a scathing blend of apocalyptic agitprop with unexpected elements of acoustic folk rock. The band has never been especially well known on this side of the pond, but N.M.A. is no less powerful two decades after its début.

MCCARREN PARK POOL
Lorimer St. between Bayard St. and Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—Aug. 29: The Canadian performer and Broken Social Scene alum **Feist** has matured from a purveyor of easy-listening music for the hipster set into a sharp singer-songwriter. Sept. 8: The awkward and lovable vocals of **Modest Mouse.** The long-running indie-rock group from Seattle became an overnight success in the summer of 2004 when its album "Good News for People Who Love Bad News" delivered a surprise hit single, "Float On." The band's most recent release, "We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank," has done even better, hitting No. 1 on the Billboard charts. With **Love as Laughter,** which is led by the guitar-toting minstrel Sam Jayne.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn—Sept. 4: The punk-rock poetess **Patti Smith** and her band christen this new Brooklyn nightspot. It's run by the Bowery Presents, the growing local promotional enterprise that owns the Bowery Ballroom and the Mercury Lounge, and it's situated in the old Northsix space for those of you keeping tabs on the comings and goings of area clubs. Sept. 7: The moody grooves of **Joseph Arthur.** Sept. 8: **Vampire Weekend,** a new local band with a growing following, mixes Afro-pop into its toe-tapping rock. Sept. 10: The celebrated indie-rock group **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.** (For more information visit www.musichallofwilliamsburg.com, or call 212-260-4700 prior to Sept. 4 and 718-486-5400 thereafter.)

RANDALL'S ISLAND
East and Harlem Rivers (212-307-7171)—Sept. 9: Farm Aid. **Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellencamp, Dave Matthews,** and many others turn out to support small agriculture.

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 6: **Peter Bjorn and John** are indie rockers with a soft spot for the winsome pop of the sixties. The three friends from Stockholm, Sweden, punctuate their sunny vision with handclaps, whistling, and other sweet effects.

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 5: The **Arctic Monkeys** are the latest in a storied dynasty of British bands—including the Sex Pistols, the Jam, the Smiths, and the Stone Roses—to have garnered considerable praise in their homeland. While their second album, "Favourite Worst Nightmare," is full of the same sort of youthful bile and messianic swagger as its predecessor's, the band hasn't quite managed to become a household name in the States. Sept. 6: **Gov't Mule,** the bristling Allman Brothers offshoot led by the slide guitarist Warren Haynes.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 3: Like Sonic Youth, Amherst's **Dinosaur Jr.** defied hardcore orthodoxy in the eighties by slowing down their tempos and re-imagining the possibilities of the electric guitar, largely thanks to the singer-guitarist J Mascis. They were renowned for their explosive volume, ear-ravaging feedback, and Mascis's signature sleepy drawl, and their music influenced the grunge and alternative-rock movements that followed them a decade later. Mascis carried the band's name through the nineties (without the bassist Lou Barlow). Two years ago everyone patched things up, and the original trio (rounded out by the drummer Murph) has a new album, "Beyond," which finds the band picking up right where it left off. With **Dr. Dog.** Sept. 7: **Editors,** the latest in a growing line of British bands to exhume the sonic gloom of the tail end of the Cold War era. Sept. 10: **The Frames,** an impassioned rock band from Dublin, Ireland, have a catalogue of arena-ready anthems.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 29-Sept. 1: If it's possible to be simultaneously ubiquitous and underappreciated, then the pianist **Richie Beirach** fits the bill. For the past four decades, he's worked for, or with, a broad swath of significant jazz players, including Stan Getz, John Abercrombie, and George Coleman, yet his name remains familiar mainly to the cognoscenti. He celebrates his sixtieth birthday in style, joined by the likes of the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** and the drummer **Billy Hart.** Sept. 5-8: The saxophonist **Dave Leibman** returns to the music of Miles Davis's influential 1972 album, "On the Corner," which Leibman played on. He's joined by the bassist **Anthony Jackson** and another Davis alumni, the guitarist **Mike Stern.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 28-Sept. 1: A peculiar double bill brings together the clarinettist **Don Byron's Ivey Divey** band, which spins a new-jazz take on swing-era material, and the Kyrgyzstan-born piano virtuoso **Eldar.** (Eldar has the night to himself on Sept. 2.) Sept. 4-5: The young Cuban-born drummer **Francisco Mela** leads an ensemble with the pianist **Jason Moran,** the saxophonist **Mark Turner,** and others. Sept. 6-9: **Al Di Meola** has come a long way since the days when he spent his time trying to raise smoke from his fret board during the manic heyday of fusion. The dexterous guitarist's passion is now world music.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: Meat-and-potatoes hard bop from a band that holds old ways sacred. **One for All** is stocked with talented young traditionalists, including the tenor saxophonist **Eric Alexander,** the trombonist **Steve Davis,** and the pianist **David Hazeltine.** Sept. 4-9: **Cindy Blackman,** an accom-

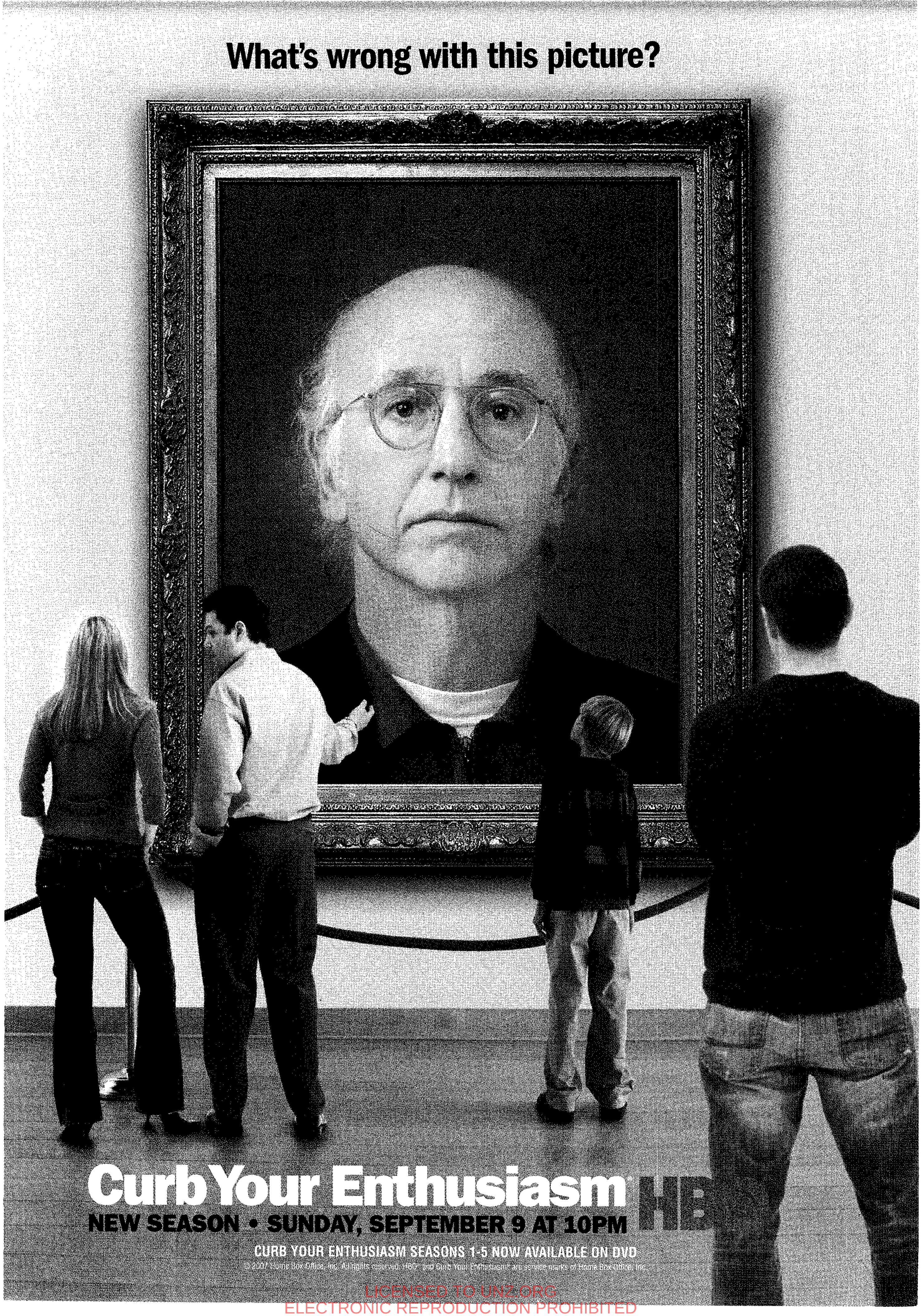
TABLES FOR TWO
RAMEN SETAGAYA

141 First Ave., between St. Mark's Pl. and 9th St. (212-529-2740)—Long known in the U.S. merely as a staple of dorm-room hot plates, ramen has now risen high enough in culinary estimation to have its own battles of braggadocio. When Ramen Setagaya, the first American outpost of a Japanese chain, opened in June, its manager provoked food-blog controversy by claiming that its broth was more authentic than that of the current ramen heavyweight, Momofuku (which, defenders pointed out, never professed to serve "traditional" ramen, anyway). All this over noodles and broth? Still, there seems to be an insatiable appetite for the stuff. On a recent evening, the line to get a seat on one of Setagaya's stools was twenty deep. "It's like ramen 'Iron Chef,' " one waiting diner said, peering through the plate-glass window at the open kitchen and the clouds of steam engulfing the cooks. (In fact, the founding chef, Tsukasa Maejima, has competed in a televised cooking competition in Japan.)

Once inside, it felt like a tiny slice of Tokyo. Laminated menus were printed in both English and Japanese; the flat-screen TV on one wall noiselessly broadcast gleefully bright Japanese variety shows; the kitchen staff shouted out orders of *cha-syu* (roast pork) and *oyako-don* (chicken and egg served over rice). There's not much to choose from on the menu, but plenty of information. The broth: pork bone, chicken, chicken bone, Raus seaweed, Kishin seaweed, dried mushrooms, dried scallops, dried anchovies, garlic, ginger, cabbage, red pepper. The salt in the broth: Khanh Hoa salt, a "naturally sun-dried crystallized sea salt—more than salt, bitter, sour, and even a little sweet." The bamboo shoots are soaked in the broth, to "harmonize better"; the noodles are topped with dried scallop, "fried and grinded to a flake."

The particularity pays off. In the *shio* ramen—*shio* means "salt," and refers to the base of the soup—thin noodles swim in a light, fresh broth, accompanied by a gelatinous pickled egg, fatty, tender slices of grilled pork, bamboo shoots, and seaweed. The *tsuke-men* ramen separates noodle from liquid; the ramen is thicker and chewier, the broth deeper and saltier, mingling scallops with chunks of pork. (There are also "deluxe" versions, but that just indicates an extra portion of noodles.) The food comes fast, and the pressure—always polite—is for a speedy turnover; still, you've hardly had a happier half hour, even if it took twice that long to get in the door. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $9.50-$12.)

—*Andrea Thompson*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plished drummer who moves easily among jazz, R. & B., and rock ensembles, leads her own unit.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 30-31: The saxophonist **Oliver Lake,** the bassist **Reggie Workman,** and the drummer **Andrew Cyrille** are jazz veterans who share forward-thinking ideals as well as undiminished energy. They regularly appear as Trio 3, and on this occasion the band is joined by a younger collaborator, the pianist **Geri Allen.** Sept. 1-2: The saxophonist **Javon Jackson** and the trumpeter **Eddie Henderson** are the front-line horns in a tribute to the late master tenorist Joe Henderson. Sept. 5: **Wolfgang Muthspiel,** a shining light of the contemporary-jazz-guitar generation, celebrates the release of his new album, "Bright Side." Sept. 6-9: The guitarist **Larry Coryell,** one of the fathers of fusion, will presumably turn up the juice again when the bassist **Mark Egan** and the drummer **Paul Wertico** join him.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 30: Travelling light, the vocalist **Mina Agossi** employs only bass and drums to back her. It worked for Peggy Lee on "Fever"; it can work for this French minimalist as well. Aug. 31-Sept. 1: The versatile guitarist **Peter Bernstein,** possibly the only musician to have played with both Lee Konitz and Maceo Parker, is joined by an old friend, the pianist **Brad Mehldau.**

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Sept. 8-9: **Tony Bennett.** Entering his eighties hasn't slowed down America's foremost popular vocalist. Later this month, he's releasing "Tony Bennett Sings the Ultimate American Songbook, Vol. 1," a collection of his favorite songs. He also has plans to start working on a jazz album with Stevie Wonder, with whom he won a Grammy earlier this year for their rendition of "For Once in My Life," from his album "Duets: An American Classic" (which also garnered him yet another Grammy).

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: The trumpeter **Tom Harrell** stops by with music from his new CD, "Light On." Sept. 4-9: **Paul Motian, Joe Lovano,** and **Bill Frisell** kick off a two-week engagement. With the drummer Motian, the saxophonist Lovano, and the guitarist Frisell on board, who needs a bass player? This magisterial trio can be both poetic and raucous over the course of a set, unafraid to indulge in tonal and rhythmic contusions or coolly bask in lyrical waters.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Frank Stella on the Roof."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** presents new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Hidden in Plain Sight."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Alen MacWeeney's "Bernie Ward, Cherry Orchard, 1965," at Kasher.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years"** proves that Serra is not only our greatest sculptor but also an artist whose subject is greatness befitting our time. His recent colossal, complexly curving walls of steel—especially the labyrinthine "Band" and "Sequence," on the museum's second floor—apostrophize the physical and social immensities of twenty-first-century, globalized civilization. Engaging the strolling viewer, body and soul, in a visceral correlative of music, they transcend the truculence of Serra's earlier, menacing "prop" pieces. Hardheaded secular culture can lay no greater claim to spiritual efficacy than it does in this show. Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** Through Nov. 5. ♦ The latest reinstallation of the museum's permanent collection of photography dispenses with the usual sprawling historical survey in favor of a much more manageable number of groupings, series, and sequences. Organized by the curator Eva Respini, the display reinforces the notion of a MOMA pantheon stretching from Muybridge, Sander, Weston, and Lange to Arbus, Winogrand, Friedlander, and Struth, but, less predictably, it demonstrates how each of these artists worked through themes and variations. Four Ansel Adams photographs of an explosive Old Faithful, six sinuous stairwells by Atget, six Brassaï bar scenes, eight studies of San Francisco hippie youth by William Gedney, and eleven intensely empathetic pictures of Gypsies by Josef Koudelka propose a fresh way of looking at a familiar medium. Through March 3, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will be open until 9 on Thursday evenings through Aug. 30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Shapes of Space."** Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Richard Pousette-Dart."** Through Sept. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

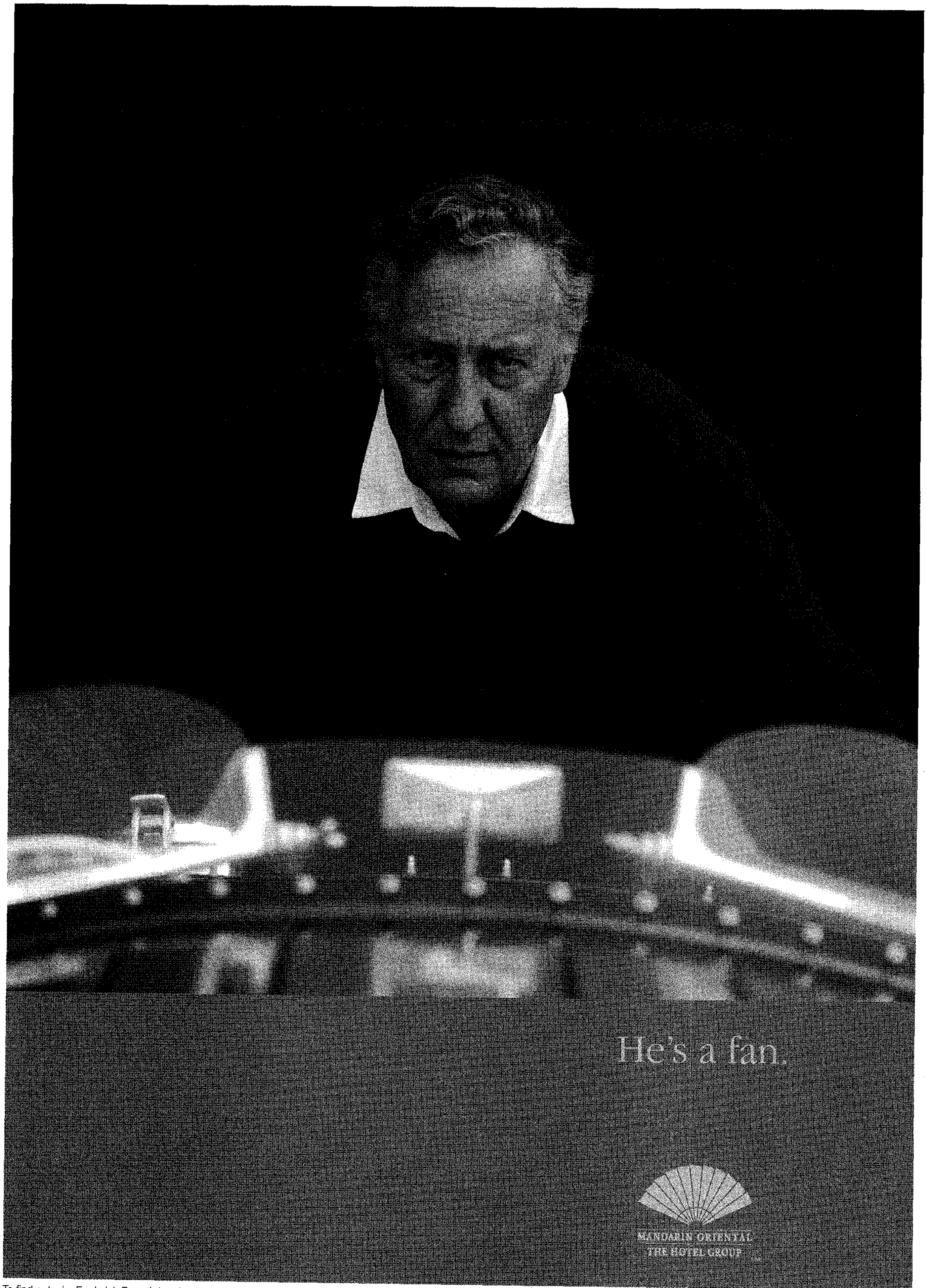
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Resistance Is . . . ."** Through Sept. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The recently opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"The Great Cover-Up: American Rugs on Beds, Tables, and Floors."** If you don't know the difference between sewing, shirring, appliquéing, and embroidering, and you'd like to, this show might be a good place to start. It includes sixty-five rugs, made between the late eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth, adorned with figures (human and animal), patterns (floral and vegetal), and landscapes. Some, like a cozy nineteenth-century scene of a country house and a steepled church, lean toward the folksy-craftsy, while others, like a hooked rug in which flat planes of color describe a solitary tree outlined against a serene sky, wouldn't be out of place in a survey of modernist textiles. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Zhang Huan: Altered States."** Opens Sept. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Global Feminisms Remix."** Perhaps because it has a theme beyond the simplistic one of art made by women, this show is, oddly, much better than "Global Feminisms," the sprawling survey that it condenses. The forty international artists (pared down from around eighty), all born after 1960, focus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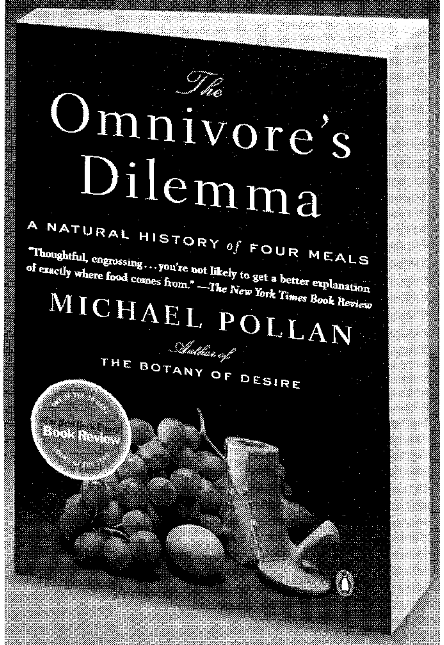
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on hybrids, often tinged with monstrosity or violence. Japan's Hiroko Okada mocks up seamless photographs of "pregnant" men; Brazil's Adriana Varejão packs a cutaway section of tiled wall with what appears to be bloody meat. "Love," the Australian artist Tracey Moffatt's shamelessly crowd-pleasing, yet undeniably effective, video is a compilation of clips from Hollywood romances: the audience laughs at a sequence in which women slap men but falls silent when men start slapping women. Through Feb. 3, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African-American Portraits."** Working with the photography collection of the National Portrait Gallery, the curator Deborah Willis has selected images of famous black abolitionists, politicians, activists, artists, scientists, athletes, writers, and musicians and other performers by a roster of equally notable photographers. The resulting exhibition isn't exactly inspired, but it is often inspiring, and it's sparked by lots of excellent, little-known, and historically important work. Josef Breitenbach's portrait of Sarah Vaughan, eyes closed, mouth open, transported by song, is a high point, but it has plenty of rivals for artistry and vivacity, among them Carl Van Vechten's Bessie Smith, Irving Penn's Jessye Norman, Edward Weston's Langston Hughes, and Doris Ulmann's Paul Robeson. Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"Biographical Landscape: The Photography of Stephen Shore, 1969-79."** Last chance to catch this terrific survey of work by one of the photographers most closely identified with the popular success—and art-world acceptance—of color work in the nineteen-seventies. Applying deadpan conceptual and Pop-art strategies to depictions of the ordinary American landscape, still-life, and portrait, Shore made pictures that were concise, crisp, and permanently cool. To put that work in perspective, this exhibition includes an early video piece, some of the black-and-white photo sequences that landed him a show at the Met at age twenty-four, and a group of deceptively casual print-on-demand books made over the past few years. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Love and Loss: A Video Trilogy by Neil Goldberg."** There is a loving, poignant tone to Goldberg's single-channel videos, which trace family ties in three brisk strokes. In the first piece, Goldberg's elderly parents read aloud from transcripts of dreams he has had about them (his mother stifles giggles). In the second, his father describes the sensible system that he and his son devised for replying to condolence notes after Mrs. Goldberg died. The final video, just one minute long, shows the artist's father standing outside on a bright fall day, exhaling onto a mirror—an age-old method for gauging whether or not someone's alive. Sadly, by the time this video went on view at the museum, Goldberg's father, too, had passed away. Through Oct. 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"The (S) Files: The Selected Files."** In a wonderfully populist move, El Museo del Barrio curates its 2007 biennial from unsolicited submissions sent over the last two years to the institution's Artists' Archive. The fifty-one participants hail from across the Spanish-speaking world, though most reside in New York; a special installation features five artists living in Ecuador, this year's designated "guest country." One of the Ecuadorians, Pablo Cardoso, contributes what appeared on a recent afternoon to be the overwhelming audience favorite—a suite of three hundred and twenty postcard-size black-and-white paintings, each a double-take-inducing Photo-Realist copy of a snapshot taken through a car windshield or an airplane window, documenting the artist's trip from his home in Ecuador to the Bienal de São Paulo. Through Jan. 8, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"New York Rises: Photographs by Eugene de Salignac"** mounts around fifty images from an archive of some twenty thousand glass-plate negatives that de Salignac produced during his stint as the official photographer for New York's Department of Bridges/Plant and Structures, from 1906 to 1934. Although most of these vintage photographs are straightforward documents of bridge construction and maintenance, they're far from artless, and a number of them echo or anticipate the work of Eugène Atget, Walker Evans, Weegee, and Danny Lyon. Other images—of accidents, equipment, thronged or deserted streets, and men in topcoats and bowler hats measuring at construction sites—are as fascinating and puzzling as found snapshots. Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"The *Jewish Daily Forward*: Embracing an Immigrant Community."** Between 1881 and 1918, two million Yiddish-speaking Jews arrived in the United States. They were poor, homesick, cultured, and, for the most part, politically radical, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*—the *Forverts*, in Yiddish—became their guide and forum. This show tracks the history of the socialist newspaper, whose circulation once rivalled that of the New York *Times*, in photographs, documents, and other ephemera. From the daily "Bintel Brief," or "bundle of letters," submitted by opinionated readers, to union organizing, coverage of the booming Yiddish theatre scene, and a "gallery of missing husbands," the paper knit the diaspora together. Through Nov. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

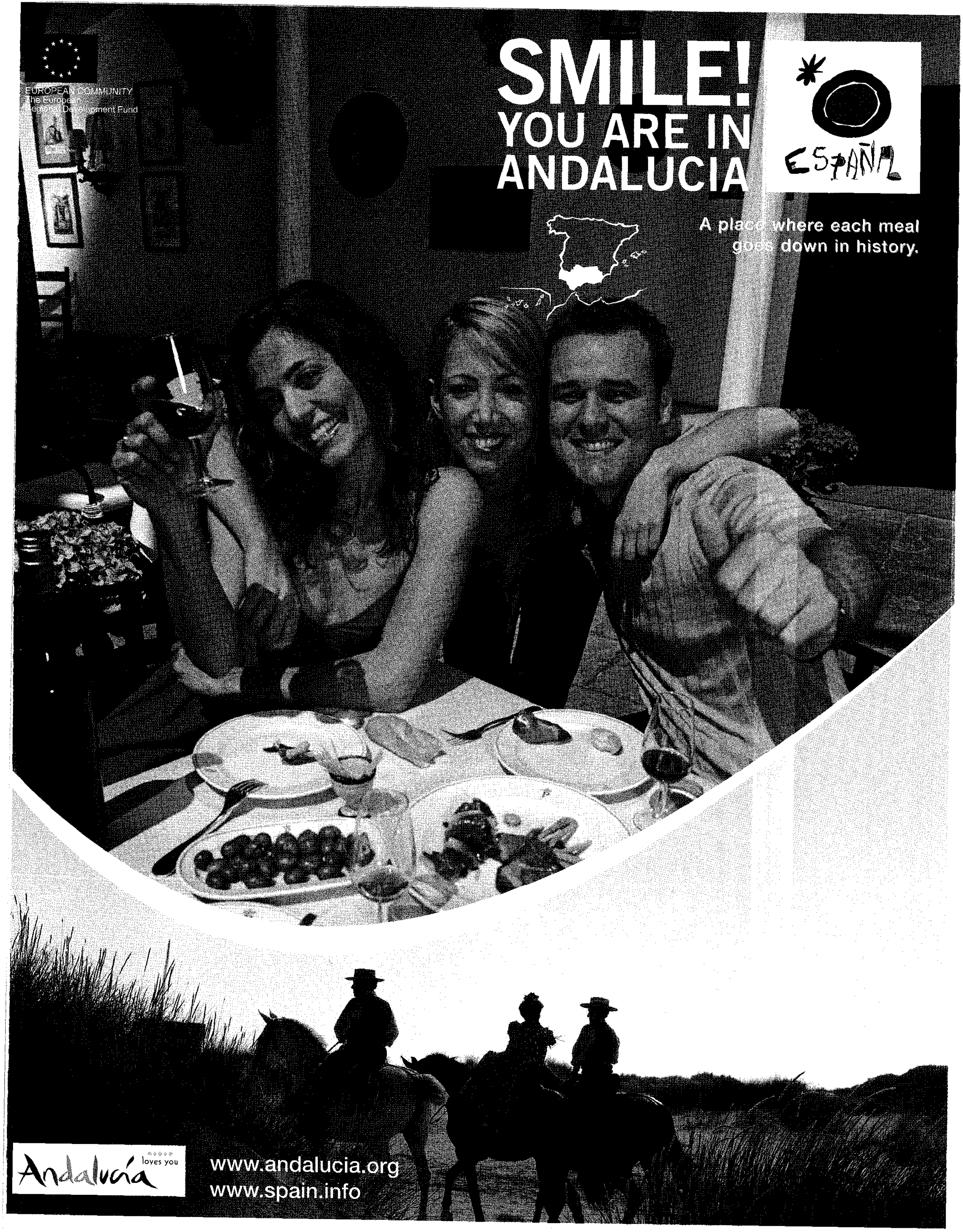
NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Asher B. Durand: Dean of American Landscapes."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"The Abstract Impulse: Fifty Years of Abstraction at the National Academy, 1954–2006"** divides forty-seven works among three sections, examining gestural, geometric, and "introspective" compositions, while acknowledging that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Minor endeavors by some major talents are on hand, among them Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Jules Olitski, and Milton Resnick. There's also a beautiful suite of sculpturally folded white-on-white prints made in 1972 by the ever-inventive Dorothea Rockburne. Through Jan. 6, 2008. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Berlin Street Scene."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Peter Young: 1963-1977."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Linder."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Young Architects Program 2007: 'Liquid Sky' by Ball-Nogues Studio."** Through Sept. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Il Lee."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"David Adjaye: Making Public Buildings"** is a remarkably absorbing show of models, photographs, and videos that explore work, mostly in London, by the Tanzanian-British architect. Displays relate Adjaye's light-loving, lyrically hospitable buildings to African vernacular themes. Comparison of his renovation of the Nobel Peace Center, in Oslo, with a tribal village, at once packed and open, is sharply revelatory. Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Midnight's Daydream"** presents works by participants in the museum's 2006-07 artists-in-residence program: Titus Kaphar, who copies and vandalizes Old Master paintings to make political points; Wardell Milan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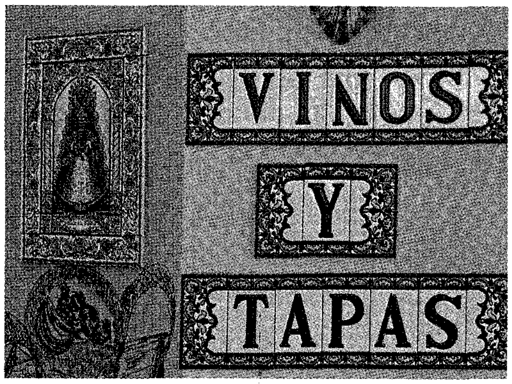

Andalucía: *Gastronomic Paradise*

The cuisine of Andalucía is as rich with the spirit of improvisation as the region's native dance, flamenco. Tapas were first created here as ad hoc lids for glasses of Andalucía's famous sherry. Gazpacho is the signature dish, and it has evolved over two millennia from a basic blend of bread, olive oil, garlic, vinegar, and spices to a gourmet dish served with savory garnishes. In the interim, gazpacho became the Moorish *ajo blanco*, thickened with almonds. When Columbus brought back tomatoes and peppers from the New World, the recipe evolved again to become the familiar cold tomato soup so popular today.

Dani García, a chef who is a rising star in Andalucía, continues the imaginative approach to food preparation at Calima, his beachside restaurant in Marbella. A disciple of Ferrán Adrià, who drew the food world to eastern Spain with his avant-garde interpretations of haute cuisine, García focuses on the agricultural wealth of his own native south. From his kitchen, the sea bass comes to the table grilled over hot coals and black sand, which evoke the sensations of a seaside barbecue.

Andalucía's Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts are a constant reminder of sea-inspired feasts. Prawns, langoustines, clams, sardines, hake, bream, grouper, and tuna—all these and much more sizzle on grills and in sauté pans, ready to be anointed with the region's fruity olive oil. Andalucía is the world's largest producer of the golden elixir, with groves concentrated in Jaén province, and local cooks seem to have developed a special talent for frying. The exquisitely light crispness of fried anchovies, squid, and small fish is considered the perfect match for chilled, bone-dry Manzanilla sherry.

In the tapas bars of Seville and Granada, ham is the culinary star. The most coveted hams are the world-renowned *jamón de Jabugo*, the air-cured product of Iberian pigs who gorge on acorns and roots in the mountains of Huelva province. Connoisseurs of Spanish ham consider acorn-fed pigs to yield the best meat, which is why this exceptional ham is a favorite indulgence among locals and visitors.

WINE ROUTES

A sherry-tasting tour of Cádiz's Sherry Triangle towns is a revelation of subtlety and nuance. From Seville or Cádiz, a day trip to Ronda rewards visitors with the red wines of boutique wineries. A drive south from Córdoba leads to the sherrylike white wines of Montilla.

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: ANDALUSIAN OLIVE OIL ©GARY YEOWELL/GETTY IMAGES; SIGN OUTSIDE BAR, COSTA DEL SOL ©KEN WELSH/ALAMY

Visit SPAIN.INFO and ANDALUCIA.ORG when planning your trip to Spain.

II, whose drawings and collages of boxers in action find delicacy in violence; and Demetrius Oliver, an impressively gifted trickster in the vein of David Hammons. Oliver's subtle provocations include constellation charts that replace stars with fur and forty-four photos of enigmatic studio interiors, captured as reflections in a silver teapot. The teapot is here, too, emitting a whistle that, you come to realize, is human-made. Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

EUGÈNE ATGET
Perhaps because Atget's photographs of Paris in the early twentieth century were created as documents, not art works, they have an unusual purity and power. This group of twenty-six albumen prints, all in warm sand tones, demonstrates his range and hints at his quiet brilliance. The subjects are both humble and grand: a doorway, a stairwell, a baroque bed, a formal garden, a carved stone urn. Mops and a bucket rest in the foyer of a modest apartment house; rows of wooden chairs are swallowed up in the soaring interior of Saint-Sulpice. Although Atget's Paris is frozen in time, it has a distinct heartbeat. Through Sept. 8. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

MARCEL BROODTHAERS
The Belgian Conceptualist, who died in 1976, on his fifty-second birthday, was a great political artist. "Décor: A Conquest," a cunning two-part installation from 1974, proves it. "Décor XIXth Century" juxtaposes Edwardian chairs and candelabra, potted plants, a stuffed python, and a cowboy-movie poster with Napoleonic-era cannons and an Old West six-shooter. (In a corner, Lewis Carroll-ishly, a toy lobster and crab play cards.) In "Décor XXth Century," a jigsaw puzzle of the Battle of Waterloo nears completion on a patio table, surrounded by neatly arrayed modern pistols, assault rifles, and a hand grenade. The insinuated relation of domestic comfort and warfare clicks when you register that interior decoration will never rival tools of death for (awful) beauty. Through Sept. 15. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

ROXY PAINE
Walking toward Madison Square Park on a sunny day, one first glimpses Paine's three stainless-steel sculptures as clinical glints of metal flickering between leaves. Up close, his towering metal trees—around forty feet tall—and huge boulders look like mutant prostheses on the body of nature. "Defunct" is a giant dead tree, its limbs cracked and broken; "Conjoined" presents a pair of leafless but apparently thriving Siamese-twin trees, their branches seamlessly intertwined; the double boulders in "Erratic" look like gleaming remnants of some industrial glacier. Through Dec. 31. (Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 23rd St. 212-538-9310.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ALEN MACWEENEY
The Dublin-born, New York-based photographer returned to Ireland in 1965 and embarked on a series of portraits of the nomad families known as "travellers" that would consume him for nearly five years. "I had fallen into the deep pool of a hidden Irish culture," he writes, and the pictures he took there have the intensity and poignancy of rediscovered love letters. MacWeeney's black-and-white images recall Dorothea Lange's sharecroppers, Josef Koudelka's Gypsies, and classic photo reportage by Gordon Parks, Bruce Davidson, and Danny Lyon. This soulful series is shown alongside photographs from the same period that explore and embody the heady influence of Yeats. Opens Sept 6. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

SUSANNE M. WINTERLING
A pants-wearing, cheroot-smoking, flapper-era androgyne is crossed with a postmodern vaudevillian à la Laurie Anderson. Sounds good—better, in fact, than what actually transpires in Winterling's three videos and photo-collages. Two women dressed in black trade a trenchcoat back and forth; another plays the violin with her back turned to the camera; footage of an equestrienne dissolves into a shot of an oil portrait of a topless girl. But none of the chic heavy breathing really goes anywhere. Through Sept. 7. (Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949.)

KOHEI YOSHIYUKI
Working at night, with a camera equipped with infrared film and a filtered flash, Yoshiyuki photographed couples making out in the bushes and behind the trees of Tokyo parks in the nineteen-seventies. His self-published book of those pictures, from 1980, has become a cult item, and this exhibition—Yoshiyuki's first in the U.S.—is sure to be one of the season's most sensational. Although there is little explicit sex visible in these images, they still give off plenty of heat, much of it sparked by the shockingly bold onlookers who crowd around the couples like moths drawn to a flame—voyeurs whose presence implicates both the photographer and the viewer. Opens Sept. 6. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

"MICROWAVE 5"
This better than average summer drawing show makes a persuasive case for a bloodline of evanescent, intelligent abstraction. The parent figures are Yayoi Kusama, Fred Sandback, Richard Tuttle, and—in the role of wild uncle—Ray Johnson. The progeny range from Tom Friedman, represented here by an uncannily Photo-Realist pencil rendering of sunlit woods, to Kate Shepherd, with cool geometric screen prints, Ken Solomon, via mail art and collage, and Xawery Wolski, who "draws" by perforating heavy paper with a needle. Through Sept. 15. (Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990.)

Short List

JULES DE BALINCOURT: Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Opens Sept. 6. **JIM DRAIN:** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Opens Sept. 7. **DEBORAH KASS:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave. 212-563-4474. Opens Sept. 7. **MATT KEEGAN:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-924-7545. Opens Sept. 6. **RYAN TRECARTIN:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Opens Sept. 8. **T. J. WILCOX:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Opens Sept. 8. **"LISETTE MODEL AND HER SUCCESSORS":** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Opens Sept. 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

MIKE NELSON
For his first major American installation, produced by Creative Time, the London-based installation artist Mike Nelson tunnels into the Essex Street Market Building, which has been closed to the public for thirteen years. Nelson's sinister architectural fantasy, titled "A Psychic Vacuum," incorporates elements of an abandoned Chinese restaurant and alludes to the tattoo parlors and clairvoyants' storefronts that are fixtures of the neighborhood. Accessed through an inconspicuous door in the wall, it's like an amusement park dreamed up by squatters. Opens Sept. 8. (Essex Street Market, 117 Delancey St. 212-206-6674.)

"NO MELODY HARDER"
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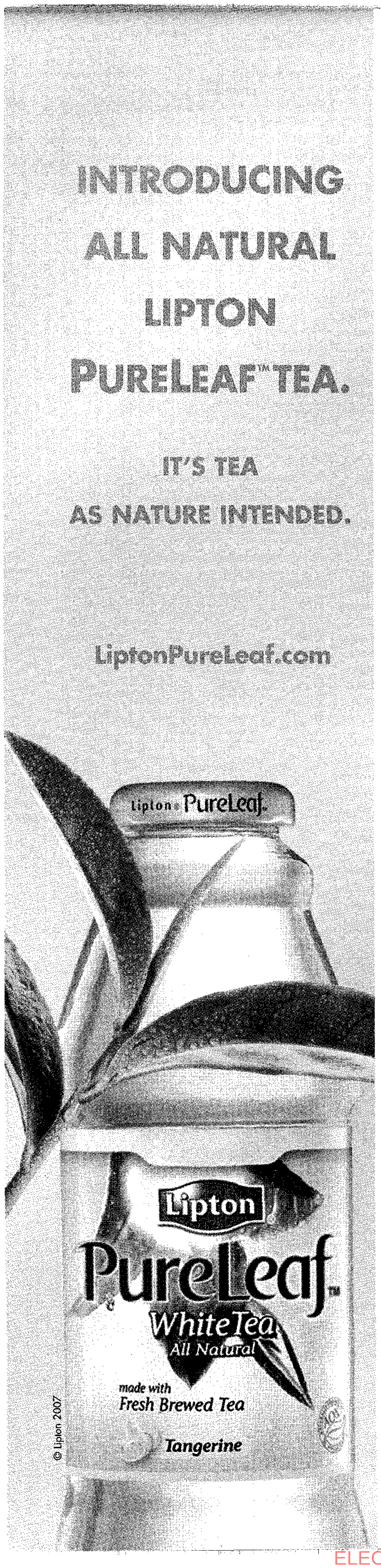

harder," wrote Gertrude Stein in "Tender Buttons." This modernist couplet provides a title—and lends some grit—to this show by two young painters, Allison Katz and Jessica Williams. If it looks a bit like student work, there's a reason: both artists are currently enrolled in Columbia's M.F.A. program. Still, their paintings make sophisticated references, to Corot (Katz) and Expressionism (Williams). Although images of glittery-eyed girls and vaguely mythical sylphs owe a debt to Karen Kilimnik and Dana Schutz, the artists nonetheless hold their own in this setting. Through Sept. 1. (Goldberg, 5 Rivington St. 212-967-2260.)

OUT OF TOWN

"ALL THE MORE REAL: PORTRAYALS OF INTIMACY AND EMPATHY"
What interests Eric Fischl, the painter who co-curated this show? The human body, apparently. It's depicted at birth (in a drawing by Egon Schiele and a sculpture by Ron Mueck), in midlife (in paintings by Chuck Close), and in old age (a drawing by Gustav Klimt). It becomes grotesque at the hands of sculptors Robert Gober and Louise Bourgeois; quirky in Tom Friedman's head carved out of an aspirin; and mundane in Tim Gardner's watercolor of a high-school-yearbook-type portrait. Sweeping in scope but manageable in size, the show says as much about its curator as it does about how artists in the last century have responded to the call of figurative art. Through Oct. 14. (Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, N.Y. 631-283-2118.)

DANCE

"STATES AND RESEMBLANCE"
"Sitelines" presents a collaboration between the Japanese video artist and actor Ryutaro Mishima, the Indonesian mask-maker Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum, and the New York choreographer and video artist Dean Moss. The work, which will be performed at the Elevated Acre, on Water Street, is a meditation on transformation and death. The performers meander through a field of black disks, interacting in surreal ways and creating dynamic shadows; at different times, one of them dons a mask or traces delicate patterns in the air with a fan. In the background, Caetano Veloso's lilting, silvery voice wafts in and out, as in a dream. (55 Water St., at Old Slip. 212-219-9401. Aug. 28 and Sept. 4 at 7 and Aug. 29 and Sept. 5-6 at 12:30.)

DANCENOW/NYC FESTIVAL
The idea behind this festival, now in its thirteenth year, is to present a wide selection of snippets—seven minutes or less—crafted by a range of choreographers. This year, it's shorter by a week, and more focussed, with about seventy participants divided into three general categories—seasoned ensembles, new choreographers, and an intimate studio series—with different rosters each night. Participants include Bridgman/Packer Dance, David Parker and the Bang Group, Gina Gibney Dance, Misnomer Dance, and Todd Williams. For more information, visit www.dancenownyc.org. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Sept. 4-7 at 7:30, Sept. 8 at 2 and 7:30, Sept. 9 at 2, and Sept. 10 at 6.)

"EVENING STARS"
Four nights of free outdoor dance performances in Battery Park begin with Ballet Hispanico and the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra reprising their disappointing "Palladium Nights." The next night features a collection of dances reconstructed by the Limón troupe, David Gordon's Pick Up Performance Company, Philadanco, and a hula ensemble; the New York première of Paul Taylor's Mexican dream, "De Sueños," is on Saturday. Some of the best hoofers from the New York City Tap Festival demonstrate the state of their art on Sunday; the winner of a Tap Off that afternoon (at 3:30) joins the evening's percussive fun. (The Lawn at Battery Park, State St. at Pearl St. Sept. 6-9 at 7:30.)

JOAN MILLER'S DANCE PLAYERS
For its farewell performance, the company brings back "Pass fe White," one of the pieces that graced the troupe's 1970 début, and premières "Reality Bytes," a multimedia-heavy comment on the media by Miller and Sheila Kaminsky. In between, a repertory montage puts into relief Miller's eclecticism, verve, and irreverence. Gwendolyn Watson, the original cellist for "Pass fe White," returns to play, and company alumni gather for a tribute to their choreographer and beloved teacher. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, 899 Tenth Ave. 212-868-4444. Sept. 8 at 7:30.)

MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY
After last year's belt-tightening, one-night-only eightieth-anniversary celebration, the struggling troupe returns to the Joyce for a full two weeks. Three programs concentrate on the most reliable of Graham's works—"Cave of the Heart," "Sketches from 'Chronicle,' " "Appalachian Spring"—and the current artistic director, Janet Eilber, continues with her crusade to provide "context" by inviting guest hosts, including Lar Lubovitch, Susan Stroman, and Jacques D'Amboise, to tell anecdotes. For the Sept. 11 opening, the choreographers Aszure Barton, Larry Keigwin, and Richard Move contribute three-minute danced responses to a film of Graham performing her iconic trapped-in-a-body-sock solo, "Lamentation." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 11 at 7:30. Through Sept. 23.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 29 and Aug. 31 at 8: As part of the barge's rejuvenation under its new director, Mark Peskanov, several new works have been commissioned from talented composers. Alexandra Du Bois's "Soleil sur Mer," for clarinet trio, is the latest, the centerpiece of a program offered by the clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein, the cellist Nicholas Canellakis, and the pianist Steven Beck that also features Debussy's Cello Sonata and Brahms's Clarinet Trio. ♦ Sept. 1 at 8 and Sept. 2 at 4: The same artists repeat the new work, in addition to performing Debussy's "Première Rhapsodie" and Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" (with the violinist Karina Canellakis). ♦ Sept. 7 at 8: David Del Tredici, not only a flamboyantly creative composer but also a formidable performer, teams up with his fellow-pianist Marc Peloquin to offer a selection of his works, including the Scherzo for Piano Four Hands (1960) and the suite "Gotham Glory" (2004). ♦ Sept. 8 at 8 and Sept. 9 at 4: The Shanghai Quartet, at the top of its game, brings its polished intensity to string quartets by Beethoven (the "Serioso"), Ligeti (the fascinating Quartet No. 2), and Dvořák. ♦ Sept. 11 at 8: A free 9/11 memorial concert features Peskanov, on violin, and some close colleagues performing music by Beethoven, Schubert, and Chopin. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
For the third straight year, the "Opera-for-All" mini-festival gives new audiences a chance to sample the ultimate art form in an exceptionally user-friendly way. It starts with a concert presentation by the company's soloists, orchestra, and chorus, conducted by its music director, George Manahan, that features excerpts from upcoming operas (including "Falstaff," "Tosca," "Vanessa," and "Candide"). (Sept. 6 at 7:30.) ♦ Two favorite works, **"La Bohème"** and **"Don Giovanni,"** are offered back to back in special performances with video introductions. (Sept. 7-8 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** presented in the standard fashion, creeps in via a matinée performance to start the regular season; the James Robinson production, set during the First World War, has proved an effective forum for the company's many fine young singing actors. With

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Inna Dukach, Elizabeth Caballero, Dinyar Vania, and Brian Mulligan; Ari Pelto conducts. (Sept. 9 at 1:30.) ♦ The official opening night is given over to the New York première of **"Margaret Garner,"** the starry collaborative effort of the American neo-Romantic Richard Danielpour and the literary legend Toni Morrison, whose libretto—a moving tale of a slave woman who is forced to kill her own children—is developed around a character first glimpsed in her novel "Beloved." With Tracie Luck (in the title role), Lisa Daltirus, Gregg Baker, and Timothy Mix; Manahan conducts Tazewell Thompson's new production. (Sept. 11 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

VERTICAL PLAYER REPERTORY: "IL TABARRO"

With the blessing of American Stevedoring, Inc., the feisty Brooklyn company will stage Puccini's on-the-waterfront tragedy at an actual waterfront—Red Hook Marine Terminal, the last working container port in Brooklyn, at which the decommissioned oil tanker Mary A. Whalen (i.e., the stage) is docked. (Pier 9B, Hamilton Ave. at Van Brunt St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 7, Sept. 9, Sept. 14, and Sept. 16 at 7.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS

The Jens Nygaard tribute ensemble, always ready to offer a sympathetic reading of some impossibly obscure piece, returns to its traditional home, Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, for a program (featuring the pianist Alon Goldstein, the violinist Lisa Shihoten, and the violist Michael Klotz) mixing the Wind Quintet in C Major by one August Klughardt with more estimable compositions by Strauss (the string sextet from "Capriccio"), Bridge, and Elgar (the magisterial Piano Quintet). (152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Sept. 10 at 2 and 7:30.)

"MUSICIANS FOR HARMONY"

This ad-hoc collection of first-rate musicians—including the pianist Claude Frank, the pi-pa player Wu Man, the Shanghai Quartet, and members of the world-music group Musique sans Frontières—was formed in the sorrowful wake of 9/11, and has endured to offer an annual Concert for Peace in support of its educational mission. This year's event features works by Mozart (the Piano Quartet in G Minor), Ravel, Chen Yi, and Gabriela Lena Frank (a world première). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Sept. 11 at 7:30.)

OUT OF TOWN

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

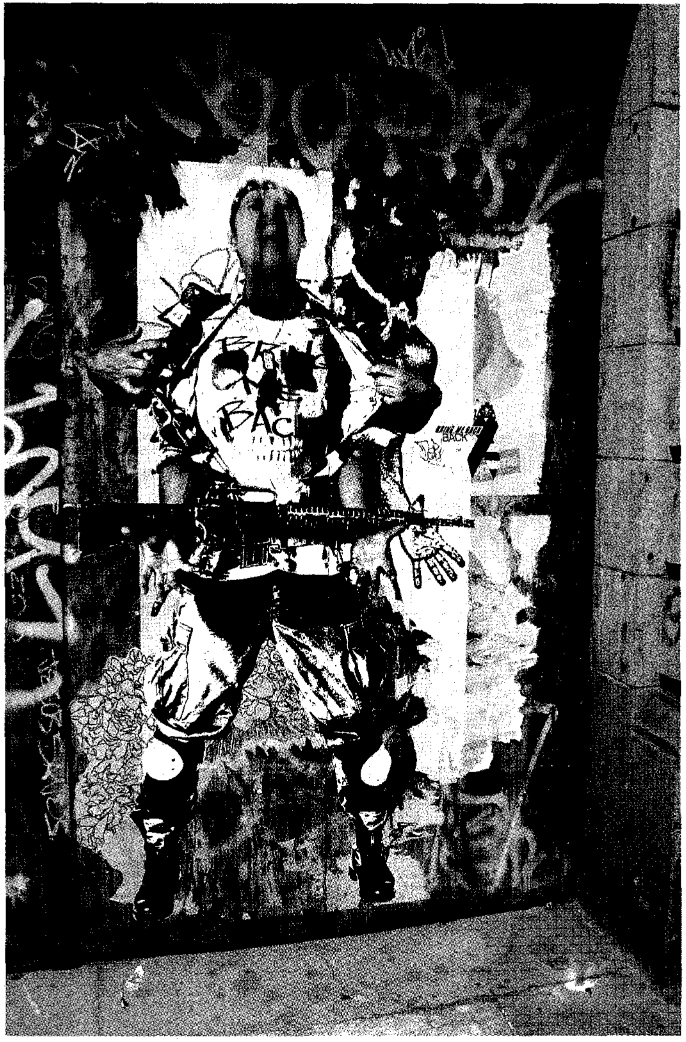
Sept. 1 at 6:30: The well-travelled Shanghai Quartet comes to Gordon Hall for a pair of concerts; the first features string quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1) and Beethoven, with Tchaikovsky's fiery string sextet "Souvenir de Florence" as a finale (with the violist Kirsten Johnson and the cellist Hai-Ye Ni). ♦ Sept. 2 at 3: Works by Grieg and Schumann (the Piano Quintet, with Yuja Wang) along with a suite of Chinese folk-song arrangements by Yi-Wen Jiang, the group's second violinist. ♦ Sept. 9 at 3: The Triton Trio—an occasional assembly of the hornist William Purvis, the violinist Ani Kafavian, and the pianist Mihae Lee—brings down the curtain on the festival's summer season with a concert featuring performances of duo pieces by Mozart (the Sonata for Piano and Violin in E-Flat Major, K. 481) and Schumann as well as the magnificent Horn Trios of Brahms and Ligeti (an inventive tribute to German Romanticism). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

TANNERY POND CONCERTS

This exclusive little series draws its cachet from both its glamorous director—Christian Steiner, the famed classical-music photographer—and its resonant concert space, a former Shaker tannery. Its next attraction is the lustrous mezzo-soprano Vivica Geneaux, who (with the pianist Craig Rutenberg) sings vocal works by Fauré, Rossini, Haydn, and several Hispanic composers. (New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-9441. Sept. 1 at 8.)

WINDHAM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The eclectic summer concert series, tucked away in the bucolic northern Catskills, rounds out the season by offering an evening with Simon Shaheen, master of the oud and the violin, who will perform music exploring the Arabic, Latin, jazz, and classical idioms with his ensemble, Qantara. (Windham, N.Y. 518-678-9309. Sept. 1 at 8.)



Part of "Bring Me Back," a series of images of American soldiers by the street artist WK Interact. The works have been appearing at various locations in downtown Manhattan and in Brooklyn and will culminate in a larger project in September.

MAVERICK CONCERTS

Sept. 1 at 8: In the mid-nineteen-seventies, a phenomenon called New Romanticism appeared amidst an American contemporary-music scene that was exhausted by perpetual stylistic squabbles. Its first grand masterpiece was "Final Alice," by David Del Tredici, a Lewis Carroll-obsessed modernist apostate, who (on commission from the Chicago Symphony) set texts from "Alice in Wonderland" with a lyrical sweep worthy of Mahler and Strauss. Alexander Platt, the Maverick's music director, has pared the hundred-piece orchestra down to an ensemble of nineteen; the ink barely dry, he conducts the new version in a performance featuring the soprano Patrice Michaels and the pianist Stephen Hargreaves, who will begin the evening with an account of Del Tredici's solo work "Virtuoso Alice." ♦ Sept. 2 at 3: The season concludes with a concert offered by a dynamic pair, the cellist Zuill Bailey and the pianist Simone Dinnerstein; it features sonatas for cello and piano by Debussy, Brahms (in E Minor, Op. 38), and Grieg. (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

SOUTH MOUNTAIN CONCERTS

After most of the Northeast's classical-music festivals wind down, this longtime series (founded by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, better known for her work at the Library of Congress) begins. The season opens with a concert by the redoubtable Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, who will perform piano trios by Beethoven, Turina, and Brahms (in B Major, Op. 8). (Route 7, Pittsfield, Mass. Sept. 2 at 3. For information, see www.southmountainconcerts.org.)

MOVIES OPENING

BALLS OF FURY

A Ping-Pong comedy, directed by Ben Garant, about a former champion (Dan Fogler) who wants to catch his father's killer (Christopher Walken). Opening Aug. 29. (In wide release.)

THE BROTHERS SOLOMON

Bob Odenkirk directed this comedy, about two brothers who seek wives to give them the children that will earn them their inheritance. Starring Will Forte, Jenna Fischer, Will Arnett, and Kristin Wiig. Opening Sept. 7. (In wide release.)

THE BUBBLE

A drama about a young Jewish man in Tel Aviv who falls in love with a Palestinian man. Directed by Eytan Fox. In Hebrew and Arabic. Opening Sept. 7. (Angelika Film Center.)

DEATH SENTENCE

A horror movie, directed by James Wan ("Saw"), about a man (Kevin Bacon) who seeks revenge against his family's killers. Opening Aug. 31. (In wide release.)

EXILED

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 31. (Angelika Film Center.)

FIERCE PEOPLE

A drama, directed by Griffin Dunne, about a New York massage therapist and drug addict (Diane Lane) and her son (Anton Yelchin), who are helped out by a wealthy benefactor (Donald Sutherland). Opening Sept. 7. (In limited release.)

HALLOWEEN

The director Rob Zombie's remake of John Carpenter's horror film; starring Scout Taylor-Compton, Malcolm McDowell, William Forsythe, and Udo Kier. Opening Aug. 31. (In wide release.)

HATCHET

A horror film, set in the Louisiana bayou. Directed by Adam Green. Opening Sept. 7. (In wide release.)

THE HUNTING PARTY

A drama about a pair of journalists who track a Bosnian war criminal. Starring James Brolin, Terrence Howard, Jesse Eisenberg, and Richard Gere. Directed by Richard Shepard. Opening Sept. 7. (In wide release.)

I WANT SOMEONE TO EAT CHEESE WITH

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 5. (IFC Center.)

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON

A documentary, directed by David Sington, about the astronauts who have walked on the moon. Opening Sept. 7. (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE INNER LIFE OF MARTIN FROST

A drama, written and directed by Paul Auster, about a New York novelist who has trouble finishing his book. Starring Sophie Auster, Michael

Imperioli, Irène Jacob, and David Thewlis. Opening Sept. 7. (IFC Center.)

MILAREPA: MAGICIAN, MURDERER, SAINT
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 7. (Cinema Village.)

THE MONASTERY: MR. VIG AND THE NUN
In this documentary, a Russian nun upsets the plans of an elderly Dane who is devoted to the Russian Orthodox church. In English, Danish, and Russian. Directed by Pernille Rose Grønkjær. Opening Aug. 29. (Film Forum.)

THE NINES
Fantasy and reality intertwine in this supernatural thriller, written and directed by John August, about three chapters in the life of an actor (Ryan Reynolds) and the publicist (Melissa McCarthy) who becomes his wife. Co-starring Hope Davis. Opening Aug. 31. (Sunshine Cinema.)

ROMANCE AND CIGARETTES
A comic drama, written and directed by John Turturro, starring James Gandolfini as a suburban family man who has an affair with a shopgirl (Kate Winslet). Co-starring Susan Sarandon and Christopher Walken. Opening Sept. 7. (Film Forum.)

SALVADOR ALLENDE
A documentary, directed by Patricio Guzmán, about the deposed President of Chile. In Spanish. Opening Sept. 5. (Anthology Film Archives.)

SELF-MEDICATED
In this drama, a teen-age substance abuser is forced into a brutal rehab program. Directed by and starring Monty Lapica; co-starring Diane Venora and Greg Germann. Opening Aug. 31. (Quad Cinema.)

SHOOT 'EM UP
An action film, directed by Michael Davis, in which a gunman who helps deliver a woman's baby during a gunfight must then protect the child. Starring Clive Owen, Monica Bellucci, and Paul Giamatti. Opening Sept. 7. (In wide release.)

3:10 TO YUMA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 7. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BECOMING JANE
Like much period drama, Julian Jarrold's film aims at bookish and edifying diversion, but in this instance you cannot miss, beneath the polite exchanges and the tuneful dances, the rustling of desperation. Jarrold and his screenwriters, Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams, have decided to treat the life of Jane Austen (Anne Hathaway) as if it were itself the plot of an undiscovered Austen novel, albeit a second-rate one. Jane, stuck in the bosom of her family, meets a boisterous Irishman, Lefroy (James McAvoy), who scoffs at her unripe prose, praises "Tom Jones" instead, and thereby wins her heart. The pair attempt to elope, but fail, and the broken affair duly inspires our authoress to write. This is not just pure speculation but heavy anachronism; Hathaway smolders like a late-Romantic heroine and looks like a twenty-first-century model. (Anna Maxwell Martin, who plays Jane's sister, Cassandra, would have been a neater fit for the lead.) Yet the ending, which contrives a meeting between the near-lovers in middle age, feels touched by true regret. With Julie Walters and Maggie Smith, as you might expect.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/13/07.) (In wide release.)

THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM
Matt Damon, looking more like a bullet than ever—short hair, blunt nose, no stubble—returns as the out-in-the-cold C.I.A. agent Jason Bourne, who carried out illegal assassinations for the agency, which now wants to get rid of him. As before, agency powers sit at a bank of computers tracking Bourne (who may be a thousand miles away) while he tries to evade their gaze as well as the goons, some working for the C.I.A. and some not, who want to kill him. Eventually, he gets himself in a position to survey the surveyors and hunt the hunters, but all he wants is the return of his identity, which was filched from him during his training. The director, Paul Greengrass (who also made the second film in the series, "The Bourne Supremacy"), composes the movie in tiny fragments, but we see what we need to see, and the result is pretty nearly always thrilling. Some of the chase sequences go on for as long as ten minutes. With David Strathairn and Joan Allen as agency bigwigs. The screenplay, vaguely suggested by Robert Ludlum's novels, is credited to Tony Gilroy (who has worked on the entire series) and many other writers.—*David Denby* (8/6/07) (In wide release.)

DEEP WATER
The story of Donald Crowhurst, a sensation in its day, has been told before in print, but not on film—a surprising omission, given not only the twists of the tale but the wealth of visual evidence that was waiting to be unearthed. Now, at last, it is laid out in a new documentary. Crowhurst was a contestant in a non-stop, round-the-world race for lone yachtsmen, held in 1968. Compared to his fellow-entrants, he was a novice, and, when catastrophe loomed after barely a month at sea, he took drastic action. For anyone unfamiliar with what happened next, the directors, Louise Osmond and Jerry Rothwell, proceed with patient suspense. We get shaky, firsthand footage from Crowhurst's boat, audiotapes of his solitary thoughts, and interviews with friends and relatives who, even now, seem agonized by the outcome. Like most sagas of deceit, the Crowhurst tale tends to inspire fanatical interest, and the movie does well to maintain an even keel.—*A.L.* (8/27/07) (Angelika Film Center.)

DELIRIOUS
There are glitches in the narrative, but otherwise this is a tough, acid, truth-telling New York independent film, written and directed by Tom DiCillo, about an aging paparazzo, Les (Steve Buscemi), and Toby (Michael Pitt), the good-looking street kid whom he makes his assistant. Les teaches Toby how to crash parties, cadge or steal goody bags, and other necessary skills; they live together, but spiritually they are homeless, two lost men desperately hanging on to the edges of the fast life. The movie bears more than a casual resemblance to "Midnight Cowboy," with touches of "A Star Is Born" thrown in. The street kid, who wants to be an actor, moves up the celebrity ladder quickly with the help of a casting director (Gina Gershon) and a troubled pop star (Alison Lohman) who take a fancy to him, but he leaves his mentor behind.—*D.D.* (8/20/07) (Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

EXILED
One of the masters of Hong Kong cinema, Johnnie To, brings his best game to this genre-busting gangster drama. The story, played a bit like a black comedy, concerns a gangster marked for death and the hit men who help him pull off one last job in order to provide for his family. As their plans unravel and the violence builds, the film becomes a poetic discourse on honor among thieves, as well as a thoroughly engrossing crime saga. To's magnificent use of slow motion within his spectacularly violent set pieces has bullets flying and bodies spinning as if it were a mad ballet staged by Brian De Palma. The marvellously contained ensemble of actors includes Anthony Wong, Francis Ng, and Nick Cheung. The shadowy, elegant cinematography is by Siu-keung Cheng. In Cantonese.—*Bruce Diones* (Angelika Film Center.)

HAIRSPRAY
The movie version of the hit musical (itself based on John Waters's 1988 film) is perfectly pleasant but not as exhilarating as the show, which distilled our nostalgia for the candied period between Elvis's early work and the arrival of the Beatles. The director of the movie, Adam Shankman, and the screenwriter, Leslie Dixon, have removed the traces of camp and blue humor that gave the stage show its happily knowing flavor. As before, Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blonsky), a chubby Baltimore teen-ager in 1962, lives to dance and to make out with the sweet, good-looking school king (Zac Efron), and much of the movie feels like a prolonged platter party. The dance numbers, however, are unimaginatively shot, and the idea of substituting John Travolta for Harvey Fierstein as Tracy's hefty mother, Edna (played by the

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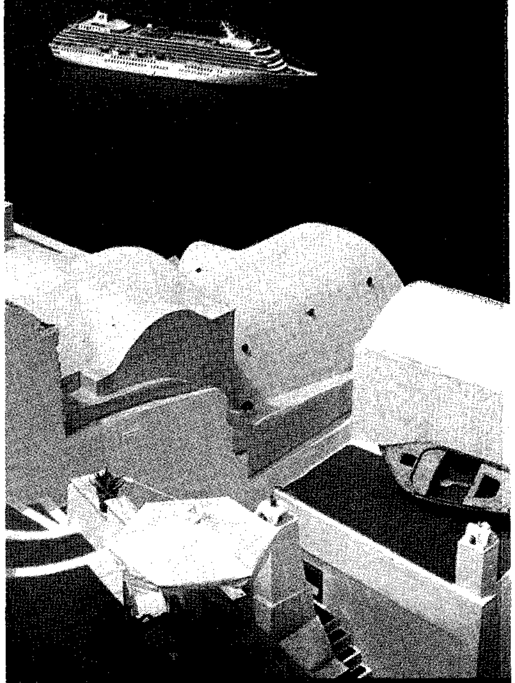

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outrageous Divine in Waters's original version), is a blandly earnest betrayal—Travolta gives a sincere, unfunny performance as a Baltimore housewife. With Michelle Pfeiffer in an amusing turn as the hypocritical shrew who manages a local TV station, and Christopher Walken, gruff and tender, as Tracy's father.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

The fifth and longest of J. K. Rowling's fantasy books gets the shortest running time, in the director David Yates's economical take on the boy wizard. By focussing the story on Harry (a leaner and slightly meaner Daniel Radcliffe) and his exploits, Yates dispenses with many of the novel's subplots and is able to push the story forward, ominously foreshadowing the dark times to come. The cleanly delivered story line has the evil Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) gathering his henchmen to let loose his powers, while Harry tries to convince those around him that Voldemort is on the march. There are three great treats in this installment of the Potter franchise: Harry's first kiss; the ethereal Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch, who won the part in a contest and is extraordinarily good); and the horrid new Professor of the Dark Arts, Dolores Umbridge, played by Imelda Staunton, whose scene-stealing, fascinatingly nasty performance is among the best in the series.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

POP NOTES
FLOOR SHOW

Hip-hop fans have endured several years of griping about their genre: a lack of star-quality m.c.s, the rise in simplistic lyrics, and various Chicken Little prophecies of imminent extinction. Dude 'N Nem, a duo from Chicago, have released a fantastic single that will clarify things for these whiners: "Watch My Feet." Hip-hop started as music for dancers, and this is where it has returned, more than thirty years later. In the last two years, new styles of hip-hop dance that developed in America's cities have spread to the world through YouTube videos of amateur performances: hyphy, in the Bay Area; krumping, in Los Angeles; snap dances in Atlanta; a variety of steps in New York (the Chicken Noodle Soup and this year's delightful Aunt Jackie); and in Chicago, a practice called either jukin' or footwork, which is the tradition Dude 'N Nem work in.

Juke music is an outgrowth of Chicago house music, which has already spawned entire cultures in England and gone above and below ground several times in America. (Anybody remember Black Box?) In the nineties, Chicago house began to increase in speed from 120 beats per minute (like disco) to 150 and 160 beats per minute. The dancing sped up, too, and moved closer in style to tap-dancing as filtered through the full-body acrobatics of b-boying. Trygic, one half of Dude 'N Nem, described footwork as "almost like what break-dancing was in New York, but in Chicago. It's been around since the late nineteen-eighties and early nineties."

"Watch My Feet" is best experienced as a video, though the song thrills without images, too. The song alternates between rubbery, soulful half time and an almost comically rushed house beat. As a bass line bobs, Trygic celebrates eating "egg-a-rolls" in China. When the drums multiply into an urgent gallop, the bass line and handclaps stay anchored in the slower tempo. In the video, members of various highly regarded Chicago footwork battle cliques execute dribbles (as if playing basketball with an imaginary opponent) and ticks (sort of like seizures) at a pace that appears to be digitally enhanced. It isn't. This is hip-hop's other side, the body plugged in and saying what words can't, and don't need to.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

HICKEY AND BOGGS

In a rare show of Hollywood respect for a screenwriter, the director Robert Culp gave Walter Hill the credit right after the title. He earned it for his brilliantly conceived script about a private-eye team in seventies Los Angeles who try to live by a strong-silent-guy code at a time when laws and mores have outstripped their hardboiled style. Culp's staging and editing are ragged, but as Boggs he acts up a quiet storm, and he elicited superb ensemble work from the likes of Rosalind Cash, James Woods, Isabel Sanford, Michael Moriarty, and the uncredited Roger E. Mosley. The plot, about a search for a woman who is peddling stolen cash, involves at least one pervert, various money changers, Black Power spokesmen and radical-chic supporters, and a team of cops led by the perennially dyspeptic Vincent Gardenia. Nearly all of the directorial lapses are forgiven when Culp flashes an idiotic smile at his ex-wife as he watches her perform at a strip club, or when Bill Cosby, as Hickey, in a performance that should have pegged him as a strong, versatile leading man, repeatedly goads his partner into action. Released in 1972.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; Sept. 1.)

I WANT SOMEONE TO EAT CHEESE WITH

This unromantic comedy by Jeff Garlin, who also stars, sometimes resembles a TV pilot for a cult show, yet its deadpan absurdities and sour realities evoke a pain that no amount of humor can dispel. James Aaron (Garlin), an actor in Chicago, performs with the Second City and on a sleazy reality-TV show but dreams of playing the lead in a forthcoming remake of "Marty." As the woman who breaks up with him reminds him, he's thirty-nine, lives with his mother, and is grossly overweight, and they weren't really together anyway. He walks out on an Overeaters Anonymous meeting and goes to an ice-cream parlor, where the waitress (Sarah Silverman) talks dirty to him, and he hopes that she means it; but something in his slow, wary gait suggests he knows otherwise. The droll supporting cast includes David Pasquesi as a clichéd hipster nostalgic for old Chicago, Larry Neumann, Jr., as a derelict who knows every actress's nude scenes to the minute, and Paul Mazursky as a slimy producer. If Garlin fills his film with knowing allusions to old pop culture, such as Jackie Gleason, classic movies, and jazz LPs, he does it with a point: his modern world is a thin and lonely place.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

LOVE ME TONIGHT

Cleverness squared equals brilliance in this scintillating 1932 musical comedy, starring Maurice Chevalier as an amorous tailor and Jeannette Macdonald as a princess who thinks he's a nobleman. This collaboration between the visual stylist Rouben Mamoulian and the songwriters Rodgers and Hart has a feathery dexterity. After Chevalier starts to sing "Isn't It Romantic" in his Paris shop, the number gets continued by others in a cab and on a troop train, on a march and in a Gypsy camp, until it's picked up by Macdonald on her balcony; it's a blissful expression of love as a feeling that can span a country and wed opposites. Chevalier is ebullient, Macdonald ardent and at ease with her own sensational figure. The cast includes the witty, gorgeous Myrna Loy as a man-hungry aristocrat and Hollywood's favorite upper-crust patriarch, C. Aubrey Smith, who in one of many strokes of comic ingenuity warbles a verse or two of "Mimi."—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Sept. 7-8.)

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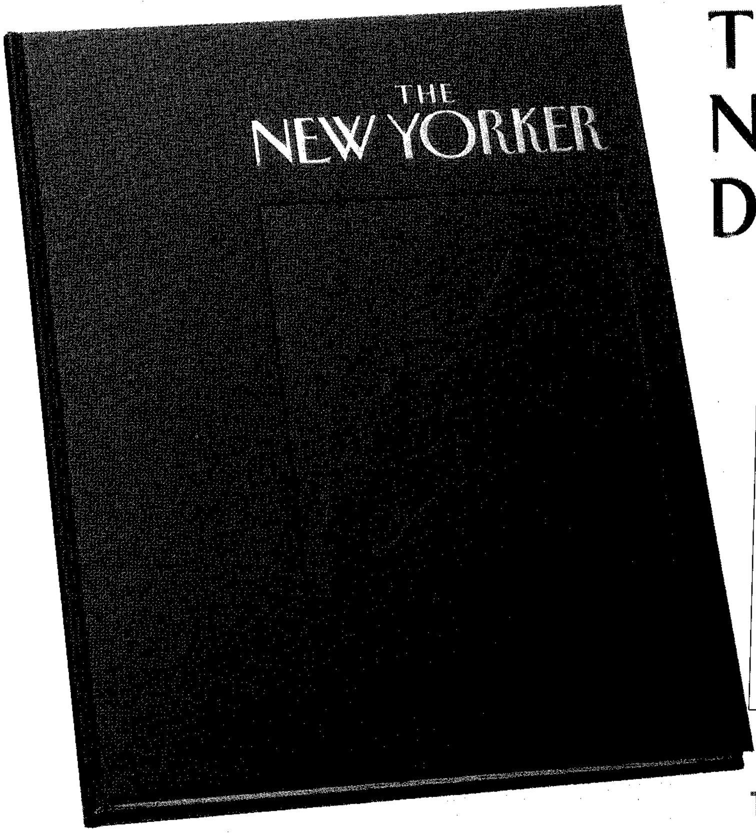

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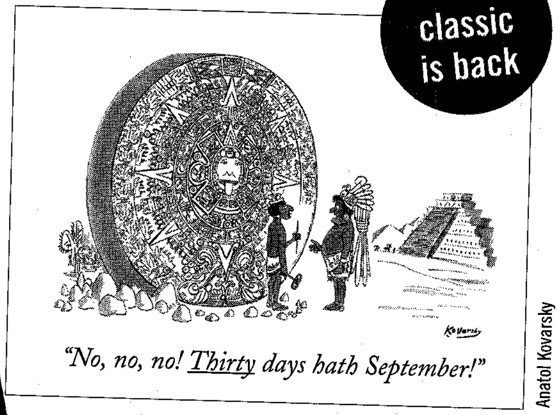
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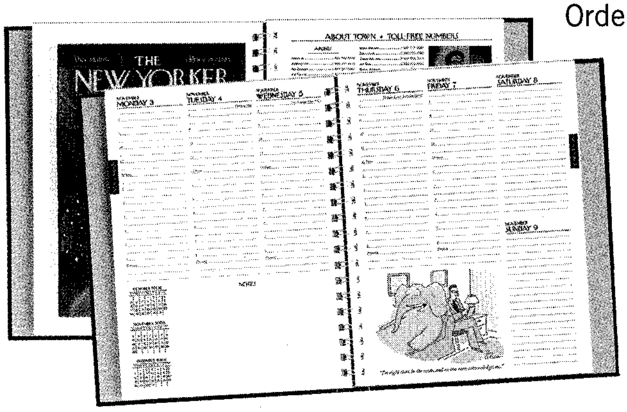

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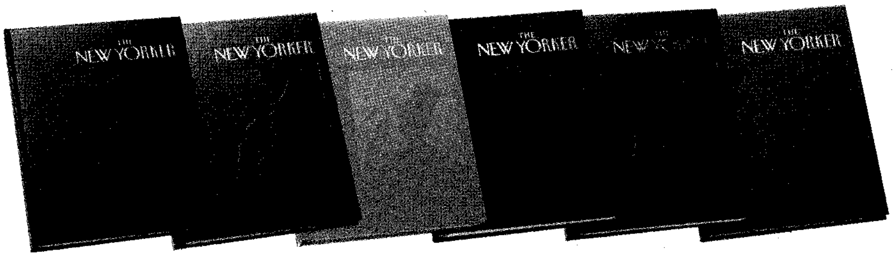

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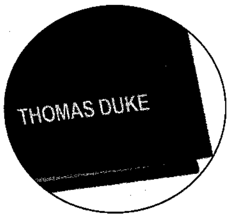

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M

Fritz Lang's first sound film, from 1931, has visual excitement, pace, brilliance of surface, and feeling for detail. Above all, it has, caught in a manhunt, a small, fat man, sweating in uncomfortable clothes—the sexual psychopath who murders little girls—interpreted by Peter Lorre with a spark of genius. It is Lorre's triumph that he makes us understand the terrified, suffering human being who murders. The film is based on the case of the Düsseldorf murderer; the police, trying to track him down, disturbed the normal criminal activities of the city, and the underworld organized to find him, so that crime could go on as usual. Lang turns the movie into a melodramatic thriller by centering on this ironic chase—actually, on the two converging chases of the police and the underworld. The structure is so mechanical it's almost pulpy, and the film reaches for other easy effects—it's similar to "The Threepenny Opera" in its satirical use of beggars and criminals. But there's nothing facile about Lorre: trapped by the underworld, he screams, "I can't help myself!" Our identification with him as a psychopath is so complete it's hard to believe that while appearing before Fritz Lang's cameras in the daytime, he was, at night, acting as a comedian in a farce. In German.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; Sept. 8.)

THE NANNY DIARIES

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

PARAGUAYAN HAMMOCK

Though this film by Paz Encina, from 2006, is said to be the first produced in Paraguay in decades, it has an artistic refinement and an emotional power that allow it to transcend all novelty value and vault to the front lines of world cinema. Its sixty-eight minutes carry Ramón and Cándida (Ramón Del Rio and Georgina Genes), an aging couple living in the deep country, from sunrise, when they hang their old hammock between two trees in a clearing, to sunset, when they take it in. Settled in its tenuous grasp, they talk about the heat, the rain, the dog that won't stop barking, the war, and their son, Máximo, who is doing his military service and hasn't been heard from lately. The father lives in hope, the mother in fear, and scenes of their daily rounds of labor and rest—images of a contemplative pictorial exaltation—are joined by voice-over flashbacks revealing the story of their son's departure and the rumors that followed. Encina's film, balanced exquisitely between the concrete and the abstract, between the specific and the absolute, is a quietly devastating indictment of the eternal waste of youth as cannon fodder in this and all wars. In Guaraní.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Sept. 8.)

Jeff Garlin and Sarah Silverman star in "I Want Someone to Eat Cheese With."

ERIC PALMA

MILAREPA: MAGICIAN, MURDERER, SAINT

In eleventh-century Tibet, a wealthy man dies, leaving the welfare of his family in the hands of his brother, who, with the tacit approval of the rest of the village, proceeds to betray this trust, stealing his riches and keeping the widow and two young children in a kind of servitude. When the son (Gimyan Lodro) comes of age, his mother sends him to find a sorcerer who can teach him the magic he needs to avenge the cruelty they have suffered. This is the first chapter in the legend of Milarepa, the poet and visionary viewed as a saint in Tibet. To those imbued in the myth, this rendition may resonate, but first-timers to the story are more likely to perceive narrative clichés. The director, Neten Chokling, captures some rugged backdrops that John Ford would have killed for, but he shoots many scenes in a mystifying darkness. Filmed in Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India. In Tibetan.—*Ken Marks* (Cinema Village.)

RUGGLES OF RED GAP

Charles Laughton starred in this justly honored version of the venerable comedy by Harry Leon Wilson, from 1935. (There were two earlier versions—one in 1918, and one in 1923 with Edward Everett Horton—and a later version in 1950, called "Fancy Pants," with Bob Hope.) The Laughton film, directed in a calm, restrained style by Leo McCarey, is just about irresistible, even with its big scene—Laughton, an English valet in the Old West, reciting the Gettysburg Address in a saloon, as the camera pans across the awed faces of the cowhands. It's a bit much, but it works like magic. The cast could hardly be better: Roland Young is the Englishman who loses the valet in a poker game, Mary Boland and Charlie Ruggles are the rich American couple who win him, and ZaSu Pitts is the widow the valet courts. With Maude Eburne, Lucien Littlefield, Willie Fung, Libby Taylor, and Leila Hyams.—*P.K.* (MOMA; Aug. 31.)

RUSH HOUR 3

The director Brett Ratner seems like a regular guy, and in this installment of the franchise he holds Jackie Chan's increasingly stiff acrobatics and Chris Tucker's familiar shtick in the mainstream's dead center with a cheerful dose of frat-house jingoism, sexism, and ethnic joshing. The story, such as it is, involves the Chinese triads, and sends the mismatched pair from Los Angeles to Paris, where they meet a suavely contemptuous detective (Roman Polanski), a crudely contemptuous cabdriver (Yvan Attal), and a multilingual chanteuse (Noémie Lenoir). This is filmmaking by the yard, but Ratner perks up near the end and delivers a vertigo-inducing chase through the latticework of the Eiffel Tower. Only the pounding music and sound effects might keep a viewer awake to that point; such formulaic fare cries out for a director with Quentin Tarantino's studious flair.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE SIMPSONS MOVIE

The incomparable gang at full length for the first time, with enough jokes, satire, nonsense, and sentiment to justify the eighty-eight minutes. Homer falls in love with a pig, interrupting the sadomasochistic bond between him and Bart, and pollutes Lake Springfield with pig poop. (The family's home state, in case you were wondering, borders on Maine and Kentucky.) As a result, President Schwarzenegger quarantines the town, prompting the locals to drive the Simpsons to Alaska, where Homer has mystical visions with the help of a befurred Inuit woman. Written by the show's creators, Matt Groening and James L. Brooks, among many others. Directed by David Silverman.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

STARDUST

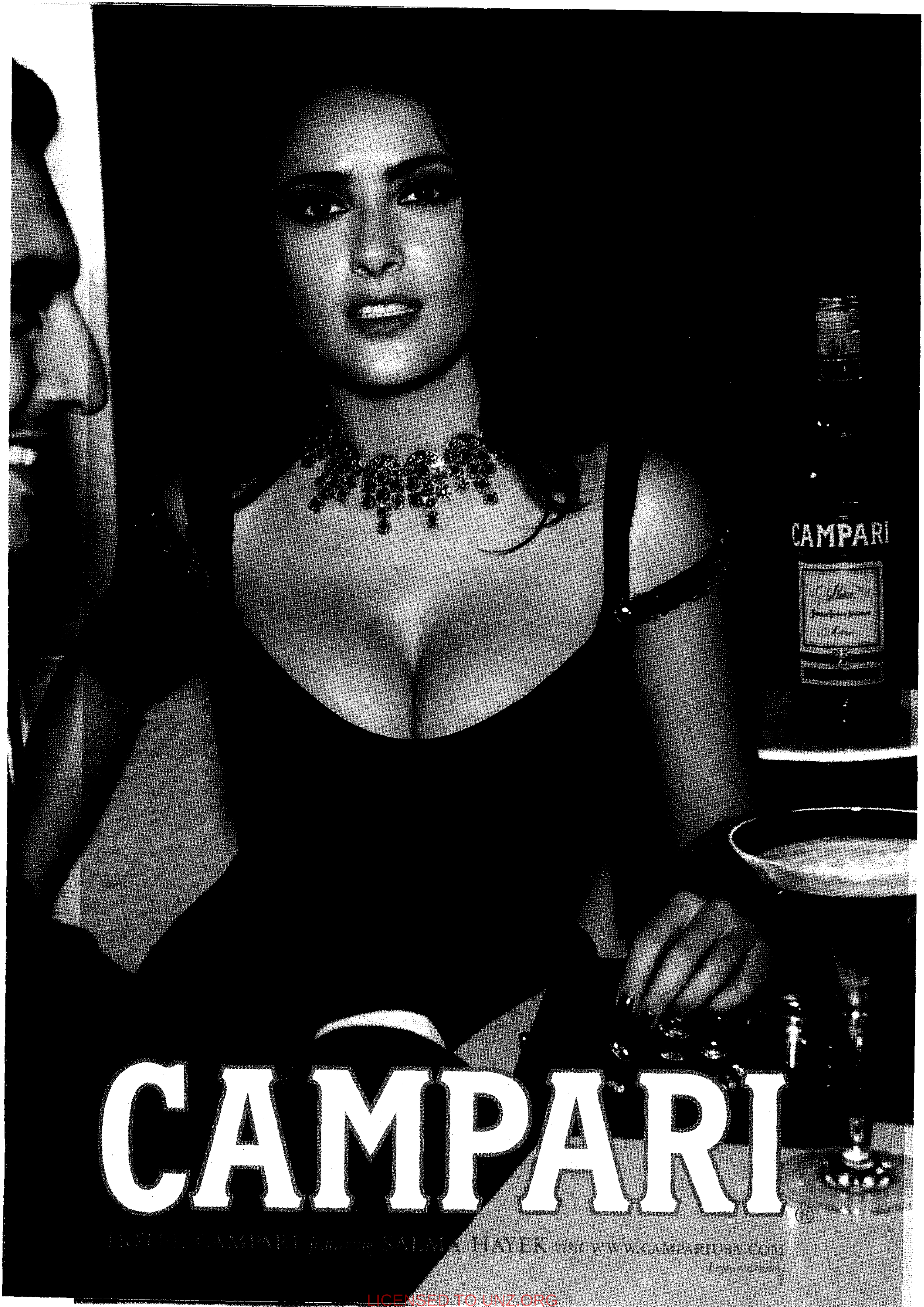
A manic fairy tale, directed by Matthew Vaughn, based on the graphic novel by Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess. The film is a rollicking adventure story that combines romance, over-the-seas swashbuckling, supernatural kingdoms, palace rivalries, and echoes of Shakespeare's "Tempest." For a good-hearted fantasy, it's more surprising and effective than the usual kiddie-matinée madness. Vaughn's direction is steady, if at times a bit rushed, and the story is convincingly delivered with verve and humor by actors who are clearly out to have a good time. The cast includes Michelle Pfeiffer as the evil witch, Claire Danes as a heavenly star made flesh, Ricky Gervais as a fence, Peter O'Toole as the ailing king, Jason Flemyng and Rupert Everett as Primus and Secundus, the heirs to his throne, and Robert De Niro as the captain of an airborne pirate ship who dances the cancan.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

SUPERBAD

A suburban mock epic, first conceived by the screenwriters Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg when they were teen-agers, and much revised, under the eye of the producer Judd Apatow. The comedy is now ripely Apatovian—a mixture of desperately filthy talk and the most tender, even delicate, emotion. Three primal high-school nerds (the plump, hysterical Jonah Hill, the sweet-faced Michael Cera, and the pale, needle-nosed Christopher Mintz-Plasse) agree to buy the booze for a senior-class party being thrown by the coolest girls. The boys reason that the girls will get so drunk that they will make out with them by mistake. Getting themselves to the party, however, turns out to be a journey somewhat more difficult than that endured by the Greeks coming home from Troy, and the friendship of Hill and Cera, who are inseparable, almost breaks up from the strain of it. The director, Greg Mottola, indulges some TV-grade slapstick involving two antic cops (Rogen and Bill Hader), but many of his touches are miraculously right, and there's an amazing sequence devoted to one of the boys' memories of drawing penises as a ten-year-old—a child's garden of verses for our time.—*D.D.* (8/20/07) (In wide release.)

2 DAYS IN PARIS

A loving but ill-matched couple, Marion (Julie Delpy, who also wrote and directed the film) and her American boyfriend, Jack (Adam Goldberg), make a brief stop in Marion's home town before returning to New York. Their stay is more than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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MODEL CITIZENS

Though she was born in Vienna and made her first important work in Paris and Nice, Lisette Model became one of the great New York photographers. Her pictures of Coney Island bathers, Lower East Side crones, and denizens

of Bowery bars, all from the nineteen-forties, have the rude vitality of snapshots, but even the most satiric are unexpectedly warm. A group of these vintage images anchors "Lisette Model and Her Successors," at the Aperture gallery, an exhibition of some hundred and fifty pictures that highlights the photographer's influence on her peers (notably the brilliant and far nervier Leon Levinstein), as well as her impact as a teacher at the New School, beginning in 1951. Model's most famous pupil, Diane Arbus, is overshadowed here by others who came under her spell but who remain underappreciated, if not unknown: Eva Rubinstein, Peter Hujar, Bruce Cratsley, Rosalind Solomon. Like Model, each has a vision that is at once incisive and generous, and an all-consuming, irresistible lust for life.

—*Vince Aletti*

long enough, however, to open up carnal and cultural rifts: Jack is bemused by his girlfriend's mother and father—unkempt anarchists played by Delpy's real-life parents, Marie Pillet and Albert Delpy—and nagged by continual revelations of her past desires. The resulting conflict is largely played for laughs, with nods to Woody Allen, but there is a rude harshness in Delpy's approach, a taste for close confrontation, which both sours and enlivens what might otherwise have drifted into an easygoing comedy of manners. Delpy seems genuinely torn between two worlds, and, where the Allen of "Manhattan" was lost in reverence for his city, the Parisienne delivers little more than a bitter *billet-doux*. In English and French.—*A.L.* (8/13/07) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

GOOD LUCK CHUCK: In wide release. **MR. BEAN'S HOLIDAY:** In wide release. **RESURRECTING THE CHAMP:** In wide release. **WAR:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Sept. 2 at 7 and 9: "Bremen Freedom" (1972, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ "An Urgent Cinema: The Films of Patricio Guzmán, Santiago Alvarez, and Fernando Solanas." All films are in Spanish. Sept. 6-7 at 7:30: "Accelerated Underdevelopment: In the Idiom of Santiago Alvarez" (1999, Travis Wilkerson). ♦ Sept. 6 at 9: Short films by Alvarez, Program 1. ♦ Sept. 7 at 9: Short films by Alvarez, Program 2. ♦ Sept. 8 at 3:30 and Sept. 10 at 7:30: "The Battle of Chile, Parts 1 and 2" (1976, Guzmán). ♦ Sept. 8 at 7:30: "The Battle of Chile, Part 3" (1978, Guzmán). ♦ Sept. 8 at 9:30 and Sept. 11 at 9:30: "Chile, Obstinate Memory" (1997, Guzmán). ♦ Sept. 9 at 2:30 and Sept. 11 at 7: "The Pinochet Case" (2001, Guzmán). ♦ Sept. 9 at 5: "The Hour of the Furnaces" (1968, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—New York Korean Film Festival. Except where noted, all films are in Korean. Aug. 31 at 6:50: "Bloody Ties" (2006, Choi Ho). ♦ Aug. 31 at 9:30: "King and the Clown" (2005, Lee Jun-ik). ♦ Sept. 1 at 3: "200 Pound Beauty" (2006, Kim Yong-hwa). ♦ Sept. 1 at 6: "A Dirty Carnival" (2006, Yoo Ha). ♦ Sept. 1 at 9: "You Are My Sunshine" (2006, Park Jin-pyo). ♦ Sept. 2 at 6: "Tazza: The High Rollers" (2006, Choi Dong-hoon). ♦ Sept. 2 at 3: "The Old Garden" (2007, Im Sang-soo). ♦ Sept. 2 at 9: "Family Ties" (2006, Kim Tae-young). ♦ "Caribbean Labor Day Special." Sept. 3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Sugar Cane Alley" (1983, Euzhan Palcy). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by the curator Misani. ♦ "Paul Giamatti Selects." Sept. 4 at 7: "The Seventh Victim" (1943, Mark Robson). ♦ Sept. 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1978, Philip Kaufman). ♦ Sept. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Seconds" (1966, John Frankenheimer). ♦ Special screenings. Sept. 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30 and Sept. 6 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bling: A Planet Rock" (2007, Raquel Cepeda). ♦ "The Best of NewFest." Sept. 8 at 4:30: "Saving Marriage" (2006, Mike Roth and John Henning). ♦ Sept. 8 at 6:50: "Oh Happy Day" (2007, Ian Poitier) ♦ Sept. 8 at 9:15: "The Godfather of Disco" (2007, Gene Graham).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"NYC Noir." Aug. 29 at 1:10, 5:25, and 9:40: "The Panic in Needle Park" (1971, Jerry Schatzberg). ♦ Aug. 29 at 3:15 and 7:30: "Midnight Cowboy" (1969, John Schlesinger). ♦ Aug. 30 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:20: "Cry Terror!" (1958, Andrew L. Stone). ♦ Aug. 30 at 3:20 and 7:15: "Wait Until Dark" (1967, Terence Young). ♦ Aug. 31-Sept. 6 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "The French Connection" (1971, William Friedkin). ♦ Through Sept. 18: The films of Rouben Mamoulian. Sept. 7-8 at 1, 4:20, and 8:20: "Love Me Tonight" (†). ♦ Sept. 7-8 at 2:50, 6:30, and 10:10: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1932). ♦ Sept. 9 at 1:30, 5:40, and 9:50 and Sept. 10 at 1:30 and 5:40: "The Mark of Zorro" (1940). ♦ Sept. 9 at 3:20 and 7:30 and Sept. 10 at 3:20: "Blood and Sand" (1941). ♦ Sept. 11 at 1, 5:25, and 9:50: "City Streets" (1931). ♦ Sept. 11 at 2:35 and 7: "Applause" (1929). ♦ Sept. 11 at 4:10 and 8:35: "Rouben Mamoulian: The Golden Age of Broadway and Hollywood" (2006, Patrick Cazals).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"The New Talkies: Generation DIY." Aug. 30 at 11:25 A.M. and 9:55: "Hohokam" (2007, Frank V. Ross). ♦ Aug. 30 at 1:05 and 6: "Team Picture" (2007, Kentucker Audley). ♦ Aug. 31 and Sept. 1 at noon and 9:55: "Mutual Appreciation" (2006, Andrew Bujalski) and "Peoples House" (2007, Bujalski). ♦ Sept. 2-3 at 11 A.M., 12:45, and 9:55: "LOL" (2006, Joe Swanberg). ♦ Sept. 4 at 12:30 and 8: "Quietly On By" (2006, Ross). ♦ Sept. 4 at 11 A.M. and 9:55: A short-film program. ♦ In revival. Aug. 31-Sept. 3 at noon: "La Strada" (1954, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Sept. 7-9 at noon: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Aug. 31-Sept. 2: "Office Space" (1999, Mike Judge).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"MOMA Laffs," a comedy series. Aug. 29 at 5:45: "All About Eve" (1950, Joseph Mankiewicz). ♦ Aug. 30 at 6: "Bringing Up Baby" (1938, Howard Hawks). ♦ Aug. 30 at 8:30 and Aug. 31 at 5:30: "Show People" (1928, King Vidor; silent). ♦ Aug. 31 at 6:30: "Born Yesterday" (1950, George Cukor). ♦ Aug. 31 at 8:45: "Ruggles of Red Gap" (†). ♦ Sept. 1 at 2: "Bananas" (1971, Woody Allen). ♦ Sept. 1 at 4 and Sept. 3 at 8:30: "The White Sheik" (1952, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Sept. 1 at 6: "Bed and Sofa" (1926, Abram Room; silent). ♦ Sept. 2 at 2 and Sept. 6 at 8:30: "I Was Born, But . . ." (1932, Yasujiro Ozu; silent). ♦ Sept. 2 at 4:30 and Sept. 7 at 8: "Zazie Dans le Métro" (1960, Louis Malle; in French). ♦ Sept. 3 at 6: "The Italian Straw Hat" (1927, René Clair; silent). ♦ Sept. 5 at 6 and Sept. 8 at 2: "You're a Big Boy Now" (1966, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Sept. 5 at 8:15 and Sept. 8 at 6:30: "Pink Flamingos" (1972, John Waters). ♦ Sept. 9 at 5: "Adam's Rib" (1945, Cukor). ♦ "Still Moving," films from the museum's collection. Sept. 1 at 2: "The Love Parade" (1929, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ Sept. 3 at 7: "The Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ Sept. 1 at 4:30: "People of the Cumberland" (1937, Sidney Meyers and Jay Leyda), "The Plow That Broke the Plains" (1936, Pare Lorentz), and "The River" (1937, Lorentz). ♦ Through Sept. 16: Films featuring Sessue Hayakawa. All films are silent. Sept. 5 at 6: "O Mimi San" (1914, Reginald Barker) and "The Wrath of the Gods" (1914, Barker). ♦ Sept. 5 at 8 and Sept. 9 at 3:30: "The Cheat" (1915, Cecil B. De Mille). ♦ Sept. 6 at 8: "The Victoria Cross" (1916, William C. DeMille). ♦ Sept. 7-8 at 6: "Forbidden Paths" (1917, Robert T. Thornby). ♦ Sept. 7 at 8: "The Secret Game" (1917, William C. DeMille). ♦ Sept. 8 at 2: "The Dragon Painter" (1919, William Worthington). ♦ Sept. 9 at 2: "The Tong Man" (1919, Worthington).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Uneasy Riders: American Film in the Nixon Years, 1970-1974." Sept. 1 at 3: "Klute" (1971, Alan J. Pakula). ♦ Sept. 1 at 5:30: "Hickey and Boggs" (†). ♦ Sept. 2 at 3: "Ulzana's Raid" (1972, Robert Aldrich). ♦ Sept. 2 at 5:30: "The Last Movie" (1971, Dennis Hopper). ♦ Through Sept. 30: Films noirs by Fritz Lang. Sept. 8 at 3: "M" (†). ♦ Sept. 8 at 5:30: "Fury" (1936). ♦ Sept. 9 at 3: "The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" (1933; in German). ♦ Sept. 9 at 5:30: "Ministry of Fear" (1944).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Aug. 31 at 9:30: "Written on the Wind" (1956, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Sept. 7 at 9:30: "Travellers & Magicians" (2004, Khyentse Norbu; in Dzongkha).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Latinbeat 2007." Except where noted, all films are in Spanish. Sept. 7 at 1:30 and Sept. 10 at 8:45: "Japón" (2002, Carlos

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Reygadas). ♦ Sept. 7 at 4 and Sept. 11 at 8:45: "Duck Season" (2004, Fernando Eimbcke). ♦ Sept. 7 at 6 and Sept. 11 at 4:30: "Four Barefoot Women" (2005, Santiago Loza). ♦ Sept. 7 at 8 and Sept. 9 at 6: "Under the Same Moon" (2007, Patricia Riggen). ♦ Sept. 8 at 1: "Paraguayan Hammock" (†). ♦ Sept. 8 at 2:45: "Fish Dreams" (2006, Kirill Mikhanovsky; in Portuguese). ♦ Sept. 8 at 5:30 and Sept. 10 at 6:15: "Fotografías" (2007, Andrés Di Tella). ♦ Sept. 9 at 1:30 and Sept. 11 at 6:30: "My Grandmother Has a Video Camera" (2007, Tania Cypriano; in Portuguese and English). ♦ Sept. 9-10 at 4: "How Much Further" (2006, Tania Hermida). ♦ Sept. 9 at 8:15: "Amores Perros" (2000, Alejandro González Iñárritu). ♦ Sept. 11 at 2: "Never on a Sunday" (2006, Daniel Gruener).

READINGS AND TALKS

JOHN CAGE BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE
Dancers, poets, actors, and artists honor the late composer by reading a piece of his work or their own work. Past participants have included Laurie Anderson, Theo Bleckman, and Pauline Oliveros, and the only stipulation is that performers spend no more than four minutes and thirty-three seconds onstage. (St. Marks In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 5 at 7:30.)

MEXICO NOW FESTIVAL
As part of this weeklong celebration of Mexican culture, Bryan Just, an assistant curator at the Princeton University Art Museum, and Lynneth S. Lowe, an archeologist at the Center for Mayan Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, discuss four ancient Mayan cities—Calakmul, Palenque, Uxmal, and Chichen Itza. (St. John's University Auditorium, Manhattan Campus, 101 Murray St. Sept. 6 at 7. For more information, call 212-308-2110, ext. 103. For details about the festival itself, visit www.mexiconowfestival.org.)

92ND STREET Y
The playwright Paula Vogel, who won a Pulitzer for "How I Learned to Drive," moderates a discussion about the theatre with the young dramatists Sarah Ruhl, Jordan Harrison, Kate Fodor, Michael Friedman, John Dempsey, Rinne Groff, Sarah Treem, and Adam Bock. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Sept. 10 at 8.)

BRYANT PARK
The Academy of American Poets presents readings by Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Joshua Clover, and Bob Hicok. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-768-4242. Sept. 11 at 12:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"THE BIG DRAW"
This daylong downtown event puts sketchbooks in the hands of the masses and encourages everyone to start drawing. There are artist-led events at five locations, including Battery Park City, the South Street Seaport, and the World Financial Center, where Sheila Pepe's project helps to expand the notion of what it means to draw—her work "Bus Lines" involves stringing rope, yarn, and shoelaces between parked buses. (For more information, visit www.drawingcenter.org. Sept. 8, from 11 to 11.)

"THE SEPTEMBER CONCERT"
One year to the day after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, hundreds of musicians of all stripes took to parks, schools, cafés, churches, and other spaces throughout New York City, as a way of remembering the victims and offering hope for the future. Since then, annual concerts commemorating 9/11 have spread to cities around the globe. This year will see more than a hundred concerts around town on September 11. (For more information, visit www.septemberconcert.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Put away your flip-flops and pull out your wallet: auction season is back. **Christie's** gets things started with a genteel House Sale of furnishings and decorations (Sept. 5-6), then transitions to a day devoted to photographs (Sept. 7), opening with a morning auction featuring the collection of the late Isadore and Kelly Friedman; the sale focusses on New York and Parisian scenes (such as Brassaï's iconic image of lovers canoodling in a dark doorway in the Latin Quarter), pictorialist images by Stieglitz and Strand, among others, and contemporary nudes. The "First Open" sale (Sept. 10) is aimed at younger, less than super-rich collectors looking to get into the overheated market in postwar and contemporary art; it includes (relatively) reasonably priced works by such artists as Basquiat, Yoshitoto Nara, and Wangechi Mutu. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** kicks off the season with a pair of wine auctions (Sept. 7-8), the first of which is a large single-owner sale from the collection of Thomas O. Ryder, formerly the publisher of *Food & Wine* and other life-style magazines and currently a partner in several chic New York restaurants. The Ryder sale is flush with wines from Bordeaux, the Rhône Valley, and California (including bottles of Ridge Monte Bello, Heitz "Martha's Vineyard," Dominus, and Mayacamus) and culminates in a multicourse dinner—B.Y.O.W., of course. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

The New York Brewfest, at the South Street Seaport.

ON THE HORIZON

ABOVE & BEYOND
HOPPED UP
Sept. 14

The New York Brewfest brings some fifty Empire State master brewers to the piers at the South Street Seaport. More than three hundred beers will be available for sampling, and there will be live music. (www.nybrewfest.com.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MAD LOVE
Sept. 24

Peter Gelb's "new Met" provides glamour and innovation in equal measure. Opening night belongs to Mary Zimmerman's new production of "Lucia di Lammermoor," featuring such high-wattage singers as Natalie Dessay and Mariusz Kwiecien. (212-362-6000.)

DANCE
FALLING FOR DANCE
Sept. 26-Oct. 6

City Center's "Fall for Dance" returns for its fourth season. Among the twenty-eight international offerings are Christopher Wheeldon's new troupe Morphoses, Mariela Franganillo's tango ensemble, from Argentina, and the thrilling South Indian classical dancer Shantala Shivalingappa, last seen here in Pina Bausch's "Nefés." (212-581-1212.)

NIGHT LIFE
LOOKING BACK
Sept. 29-Oct. 4

The earthy country singer Lucinda Williams hits two small venues to revisit five of her eight studio albums. Working at the rate of one release a night, she'll play "World Without Tears" (2003) and "Essence" (2001) at the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza and "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road" (1998), "Sweet Old World" (1990), and her self-titled release (1988) at Town Hall. (www.ticketmaster.com.)

MOVIES
BACK IN THE U.S.S.R.
Oct. 3-14

The director Mikhail Kalatozov's "The Cranes Are Flying," a harsh yet lyrical romance that opens with Germany's unexpected invasion of Russia in June of 1941, won the Golden Palm at Cannes in 1958, yet he is now best known for the visually delirious propaganda film "I Am Cuba," from 1964. BAM offers a welcome retrospective of his career, which stretched back to 1927. (718-636-4100.)

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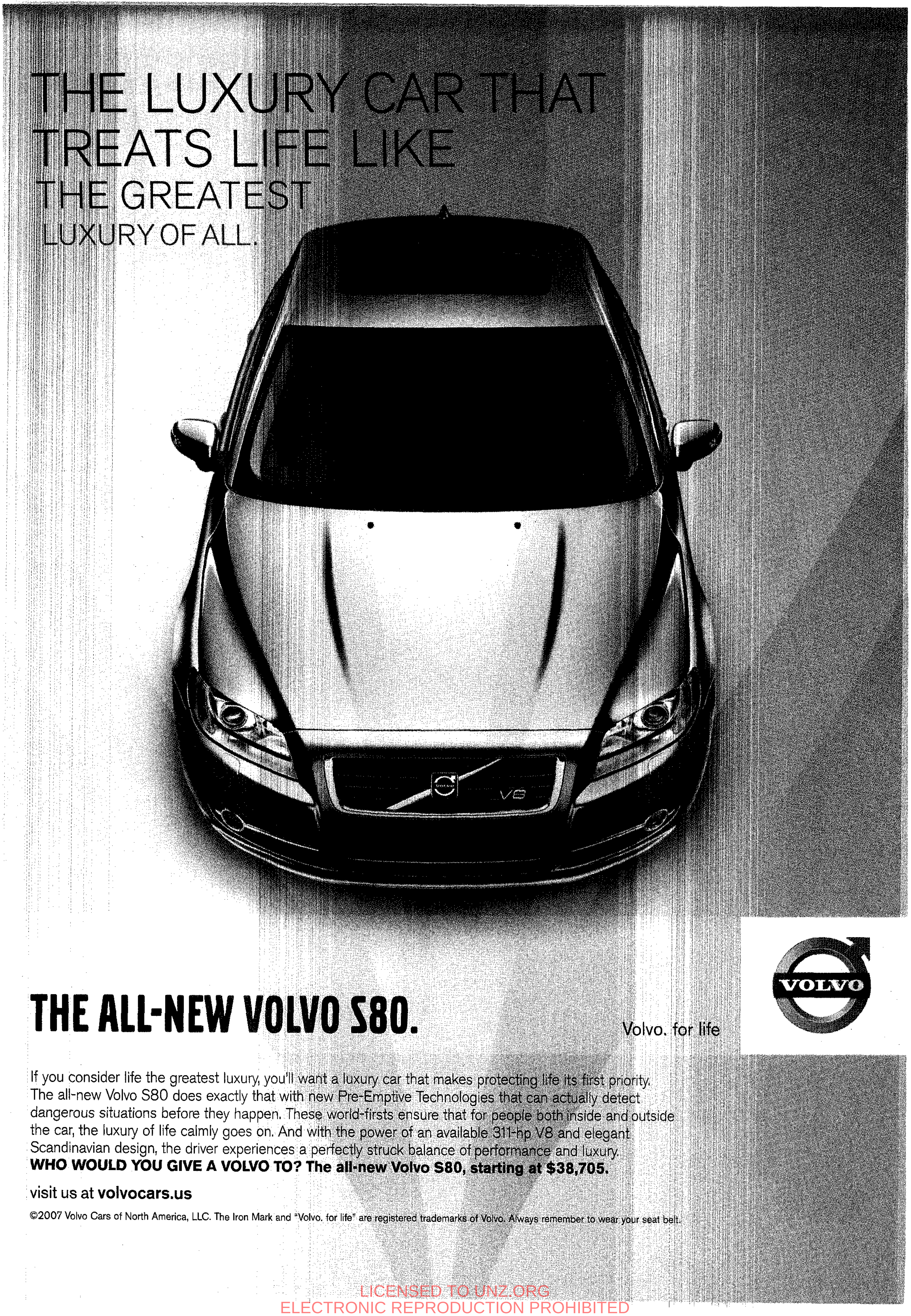

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PRODUCED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JON ALPERT AND MATTHEW O'NEILL
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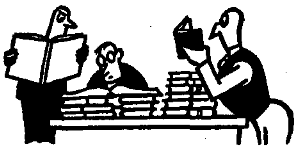
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

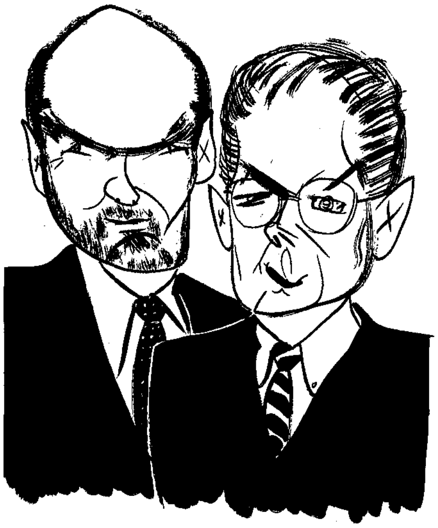
COMMENT
THE LOBBY



Last year, two distinguished political scientists, John J. Mearsheimer, of the University of Chicago, and Stephen M. Walt, of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard, published a thirty-four-thousand-word article online entitled "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," a shorter version of which appeared in *The London Review of Books*. Israel, they wrote, has become a "strategic liability" for the United States but retains its strong support because of a wealthy, well-organized, and bewitching lobby that has a "stranglehold" on Congress and American élites. Moreover, Israel and its lobby bear outsized responsibility for persuading the Bush Administration to invade Iraq and, perhaps one day soon, to attack the nuclear facilities of Iran. Farrar, Straus & Giroux will publish a book-length version of Mearsheimer and Walt's arguments on September 4th.

Mearsheimer and Walt are "realists." In their view, diplomatic decisions should be made on the basis of national interest. They argue that in the post-Cold War era, in the absence of a superpower struggle in the Middle East, the United States no longer has any need for an indulgent patronage of the state of Israel. Three billion dollars in annual foreign aid, the easy sale of advanced weaponry, thirty-four vetoes of U.N. Security Council resolutions critical of Israel since 1982—such support, Mearsheimer and Walt maintain, is not in the national interest. "There is a strong moral case for supporting Israel's existence," they write, but they deny that Israel is of critical strategic value to the United States. The disappearance of Israel, in their view, would jeopardize neither America's geopolitical interests nor its core values. Such is their "realism."

The authors observe that discussion about Israel in the United States is often circumscribed, and that the ultimate price for criticizing Israel is to be branded an anti-Semite. They set out to write "The Israel Lobby," they have said, to break taboos and stimulate discussion. They anticipated some ugly attacks, and were not disappointed. The Washington *Post* published a piece by the Johns Hopkins professor Eliot Cohen under the headline "Yes, It's Anti-Semitic." The *Times* reported earlier this month that several organizations, including a Jewish community center, have decided to withdraw speaking invitations to Mearsheimer and Walt, in violation of good sense and the spirit of open discussion.



Stephen M. Walt and John J. Mearsheimer

Mearsheimer and Walt are not anti-Semites or racists. They are serious scholars, and there is no reason to doubt their sincerity. They are right to describe the moral violation in Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. (In this, most Israelis and most American Jews agree with them.) They were also right about Iraq. The strategic questions they raise now, particularly about Israel's privileged relationship with the United States, are worth debating—just as it is worth debating whether it is a good idea to be selling arms to Saudi Arabia. But their announced objectives have been badly undermined by the contours of their argument—a prosecutor's brief that depicts Israel as a singularly pernicious force in world affairs. Mearsheimer and Walt have not entirely forgotten their professional duties, and they periodically signal their awareness of certain complexities. But their conclusions are unmistakable: Israel and its lobbyists bear a great deal of blame for the loss of American direction, treasure, and even blood.

In Mearsheimer and Walt's cartogra-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

phy, the Israel lobby is not limited to AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. It is a loose yet well-oiled coalition of Jewish-American organizations, "watchdog" groups, think tanks, Christian evangelicals, sympathetic journalists, and neocon academics. This is not a cabal but a world in which Abraham Foxman gives the signal, Pat Robertson describes his apocalyptic rapture, Charles Krauthammer pumps out a column, Bernard Lewis delivers a lecture—and the President of the United States invades another country. Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Exxon-Mobil barely exist.

Where many accounts identify Osama bin Laden's primary grievances with American support of "infidel" authoritarian regimes in Islamic lands, Mearsheimer and Walt align his primary concerns with theirs: America's unwillingness to push Israel to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. (It doesn't matter that Israel and the Palestinians were in peace negotiations in 1993, the year of the first attack on the World Trade Center, or that during the Camp David negotiations in 2000 bin Laden's pilots were training in Florida.) Mearsheimer and Walt give you the sense that, if the Israelis and the Palestinians come to terms, bin Laden will return to the family construction business.

It's a narrative that recounts every lurid report of Israeli cruelty as indisputable fact but leaves out the rise of Fatah and Palestinian terrorism before 1967; the Munich Olympics; Black September; myriad cases of suicide bombings; and other spectaculars. The narrative rightly points out the destructiveness of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and America's reluctance to do much to curtail them, but there is scant mention of Palestinian violence or diplomatic bungling, only a recitation of the claim that, in 2000, Israel offered "a disarmed set of Bantustans under de-facto Israeli control." (Strange that, at the time, the Saudi Prince Bandar told Yasir Arafat, "If we lose this opportunity, it is not going to be a tragedy. This is going to be a crime.") Nor do they dwell for long on instances when the all-powerful Israel lobby failed to sway the White House, as when George H. W. Bush dragged Yitzhak Shamir to the Madrid peace conference.

Lobbying is inscribed in the American system of power and influence. Big Pharma, the A.A.R.P., the N.R.A., the N.A.A.C.P., farming interests, the American Petroleum Institute, and hundreds of others shuttle between K Street and Capitol Hill. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national-security adviser, recently praised Mearsheimer and Walt in the pages of *Foreign Policy* for the service of "initiating a much-needed public debate," but he went on to provide a tone and a perspective that are largely missing from their arguments. "The participation of ethnic or foreign-supported lobbies in the American policy process is nothing new," he observes. "In my public life, I have dealt with a number of them. I would rank the Israeli-American, Cuban-American, and Armenian-American lobbies as the most effective in their assertiveness. The Greek- and Taiwanese-American lobbies also rank highly in my book. The Polish-American lobby was at one time influential (Franklin Roosevelt complained about it to Joseph Stalin), and I daresay that before long we will be hearing a lot from the Mexican-, Hindu-, and Chinese-American lobbies as well."

Taming the influence of lobbies, if that is what Mearsheimer and Walt desire, is a matter of reforming the lobbying and campaign-finance laws. But that is clearly not the source of the hysteria surrounding their arguments. "The Israel Lobby" is a phenomenon of its moment. The duplicitous and manipulative arguments for invading Iraq put forward by the Bush Administration, the general inability of the press to upend those duplicities, the triumphalist illusions, the miserable performance of the military strategists, the arrogance of the Pentagon, the stifling of dissent within the military and the government, the moral disaster of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, the rise of an intractable civil war, and now an incapacity to deal with the singular winner of the war, Iran—all of this has left Americans furious and demanding explanations. Mearsheimer and Walt provide one: the Israel lobby. In this respect, their account is not so much a diagnosis of our polarized era as a symptom of it.

—*David Remnick*

ON THE STUMP
ESCAPISM EXPRESS

"Politics is all sports metaphors," John McCain said the other day. "It's unfortunately overwhelmed with clichés from sports. It's sickening, almost." Nonetheless, he was in the mood to talk athletics, and he speculated that his campaign for President—by all accounts foundering—was facing the equivalent of second down and twenty yards to go. He did not seem willing, exactly, to concede that it was time (as some commentators have suggested) to throw a Hail Mary, but he spoke with regret about "the inexorable movement of earlier and earlier primaries," coupled with the compressed schedule of primary season. "You could never have a Hart-Mondale race anymore, where Hart won the early primaries and Mondale came back to defeat him," he said.

McCain was in New York to promote his new book, "Hard Call: Great Decisions and the Extraordinary People Who Made Them," which he saw as "a nice change from the usual campaign stuff"—the relentless town-hall meetings and V.F.W. assemblies. ("You've got to be able to recognize that state senator who endorsed you and you haven't seen him in six months," he explained.) McCain, who turns seventy-one on Wednesday, looked relaxed, under the circumstances, as he picked at a plate of cantaloupe in his publisher's offices, on Park Avenue. He had recently visited the Carnegie Deli, where, he said, the many Bangladeshi waiters had flocked to have their pictures taken with him. (McCain has an adopted teenage daughter from Bangladesh.) "I love a place like that," he said. "That's why you come to New York City." Pause. "Because everyone in that place was *not* from New York City." Wink. "I even had my picture taken next to the pickle."

The hard calls discussed in McCain's book are an eclectic and decidedly historical bunch: Solzhenitsyn's decision to publish "The Gulag Archipelago," Gertrude Ederle's determination to swim the English Channel, Reinhold Niebuhr's conversion from pacifism. Still, an obvi-

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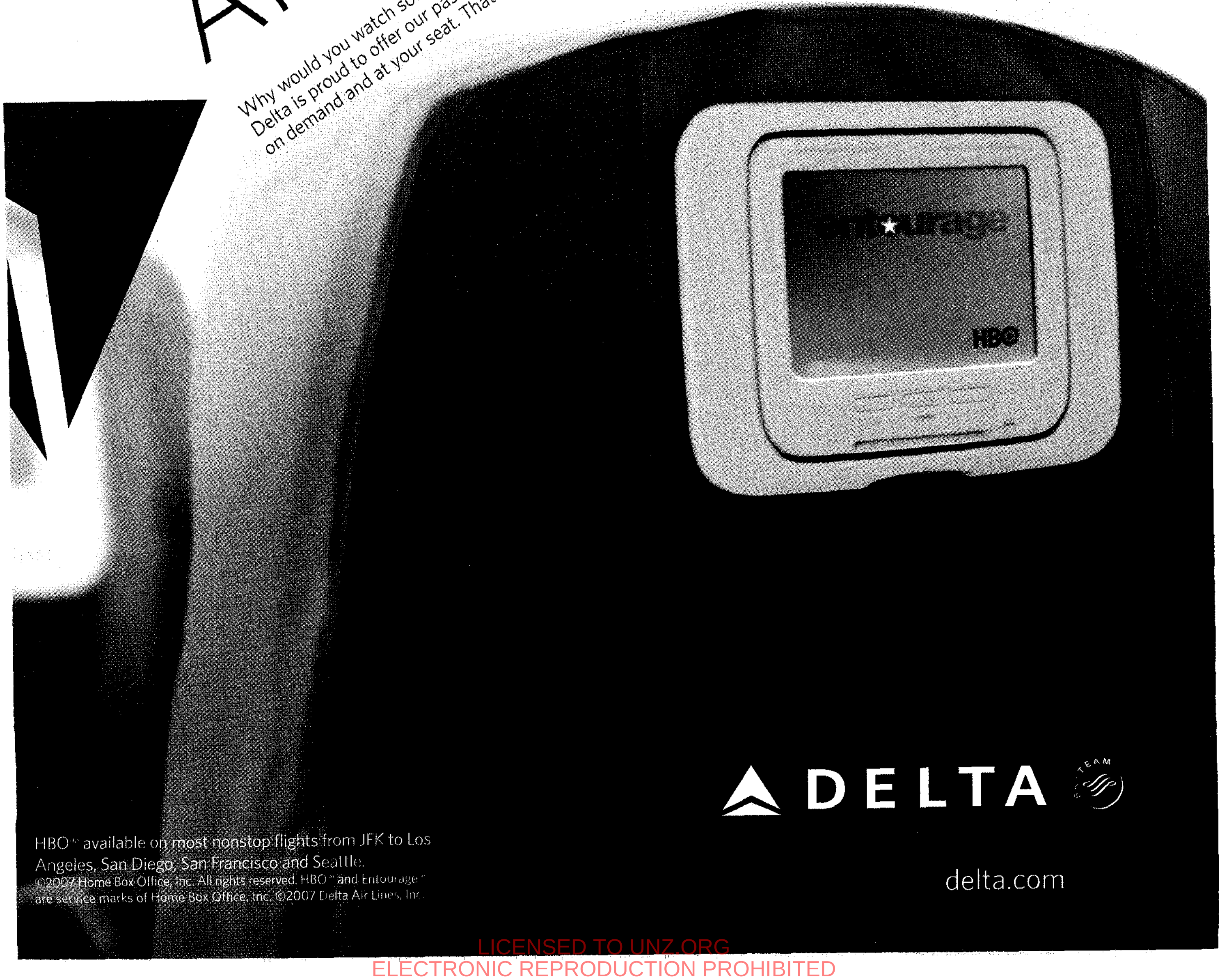

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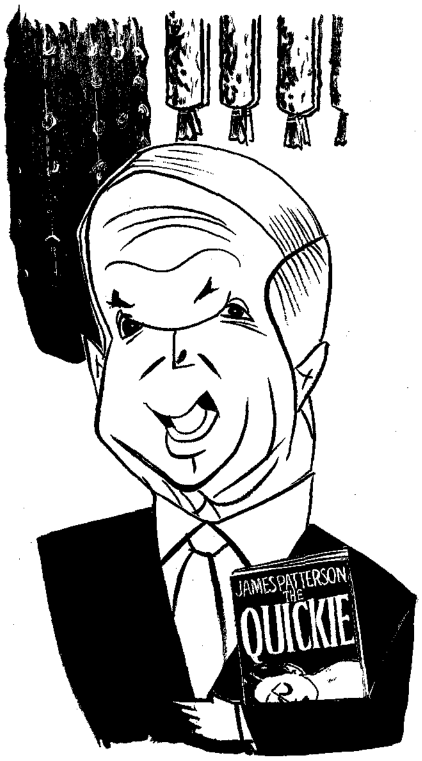
ous contemporary issue came to mind. "Is Iraq a hard call?" he said. "I think it's not that hard, because I have had no doubt. It hasn't been a struggle within me."

He identified Pervez Musharraf ("My distinct impression of him is he's basically a humble, modest man who lives a fairly Spartan life") and Nicolas Sarkozy (whose name he pronounced "Secorsi") as leaders who could, in time, merit inclusion in a sequel. President Bush's commuting of Scooter Libby's sentence, he said, amounted to dodging a tough decision: "I'm very reluctant to second-guess, but I have to say I would have pardoned him or not pardoned him." Bud Selig's treatment of Barry Bonds was much the same. "I would have done one of two things: not go or stand up and applaud," he said. McCain is still an either/or kind of guy.



John McCain

The sports talk wandered from Bonds and steroids ("I believe there should be an asterisk") to the surprise success of McCain's home-town Arizona Diamondbacks, which raised a new twist on the familiar Republican theme of media bias. "It's so aggravating to me that on the East Coast our teams don't get the publicity they deserve," he said. Metaphor then seemed to creep back into the conversation when McCain brought up the addled Muhammad Ali, and then Evander Holyfield, who, at forty-four, is still chasing the heavyweight title, without much chance of success. "One of the great puzzlements of the sport of boxing is, at first glance, why these guys keep going," McCain said. "And nine times out of ten it's not because of money. It's because they miss, terribly, basking in the limelight of the ring." He shook his head before continuing. "I know these guys. They still think they can do it. Last time I heard, Julio Cesar Chavez was boxing for fifty dollars at tank towns in Mexico."

For budgetary reasons, McCain's campaign is now essentially confined to three states—Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina—but he saved his highest praise for New York's Mayor Bloomberg, a potential rival whom he called "a phenomenon" and "a brilliant man." "He has the luxury, as you know, of waiting until next spring," McCain said. "And I imagine he travels pretty well, too."

McCain is flying commercial these days. Mark Salter, his co-author and top aide, handed him a boarding pass; they were headed for the airport that evening. McCain stood up, looked at a rack of books against the wall, and asked his editor, Jonathan Karp, for advice on what to read on the flight. He said he was looking for fiction, which ruled out Christopher Hitchens's "God Is Not Great." ("That's sort of fiction," McCain said.) The other offerings appeared to be "escapist reading," Karp said.

"Let me see what 'The Quickie' is," McCain said, reaching for James Patterson's latest novel. He opened the cover and began reading the flap copy aloud: "A stolen kiss. When she sees her husband with another woman . . ." He closed the book and winked again. "That's for me," he said. Escapism it would be.

—Ben McGrath

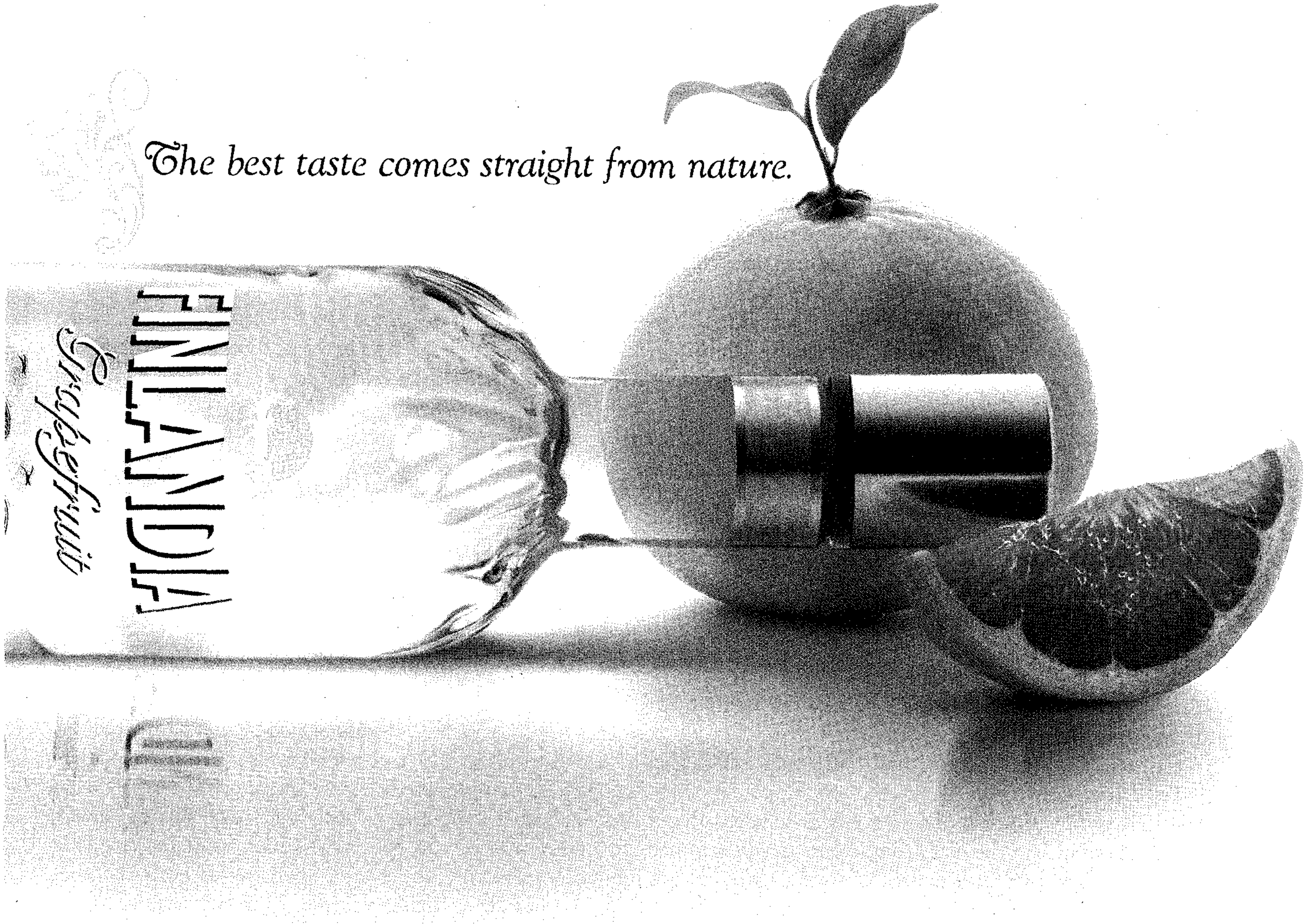
FIELD STUDIES
GIRL-COUNTER

For the past month, the keepers of Bryant Park have employed a system of electronic sensors to count the number of people using the park's public rest rooms. In September, they're going to test the system at a couple of the park's entrances, with the goal of refining their park-traffic assessments, which they rely upon to measure the health of the park and the success of the various programs they've introduced to lure people there.

This would seem to represent a threat to Danny Gordon, whose job it has been, for the past five years, to count, by hand, the daily number of lunchtime visitors. But Gordon has an advantage, which one hopes no machine could nullify, and that is his ability to tell the difference between a man and a woman. In those rare instances when he can't, he just guesses. "Sometimes I'll make it a man, sometimes I'll make it a woman," he said one recent muggy afternoon. "And, if I realize afterward that I was wrong, I'll change the next person." He counts with two clickers: one in his right hand for the men, one in his left for the women. As he clicks his way through the lunchtime crowds, arms out, wrists bobbing, he looks a little like a skier planting his poles.

Recently, Gordon has found that, on most weekdays, there are more women in the park than men. This is how his boss, Dan Biederman, would like it to be. Biederman, the longtime president of the Bryant Park Corporation, was a protégé of the urban sociologist William (Holly) Whyte, whose theories about the dynamics of public space included the idea that the presence of women indicates civic health.

"Women pick up on visual cues of disorder better than men do," Biederman said the other day. "They're your purest customers. And, if women don't see other women, they tend to leave." Biederman visits the park several times a day and sometimes goes undercover. (Look out for a fit, middle-aged gentleman in a pin-striped suit, reading "The Red Badge of Courage.") He has discerned that women notice homeless people more than men do, object more to crumbs on picnic tables, and are more sensitive to foul odors, such as that of urine, which signals that there are no clean, functional bathrooms nearby. Twenty years ago, Bryant Park was an infamous shambles. Few women—or men—would go near it. Now it's a handsome place, with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flower beds, pétanque games, a lending library, a carousel, thousands of portable chairs, theatrical performances, and many other inducements. And so the women come. Presumably, a female preponderance not only emboldens more women but also entices more men. “There’s great girl-watching,” Biederman acknowledged.

Danny Gordon, the head-counter, can attest to this. Last August, as he clicked his way through the park, a young woman from Trinidad asked him what he was doing, and he explained.

“Do *I* count?” she asked.

“You’re so pretty, you count twice,” he told her. Nine months later, they were married.

Gordon is forty-four and lives in Fairview, New Jersey. He often roller-skates to work, via the George Washington Bridge. The counting, which is one of his many duties, takes about an hour. He starts at the park’s southeast corner at around 1 P.M., dividing the park into strips and working them east to west and then back. He’ll designate a tree or a certain person—“ ‘black shirt,’ ‘red hair,’ ‘green glasses,’ or, before I got married, ‘hot mama’ ”—as a boundary for each strip. “It’s really easy to drift,” he said. The open lawn in the middle of the park was disgorging hundreds of people who’d come to see an opera performance. “I’ll get the moving traffic first,” he said. He worked fast, and had no problem clicking and talking at the same time. He’d tried earlier to estimate the size of the crowd on the lawn, and now he went out on the grass to count the number of chairs left behind. It soon became clear that his method was not entirely scientific, although it may be unscientific in the same way every day.

When he was done counting, he looked at the clickers and said, “These are jive-turkey numbers.” There had been a couple of anomalies: the opera crowd, a late start. He did a little math on a piece of paper. Still, the tally—3,370—was typical, as was the breakdown: fifty-three per cent female. “Go to any public space in the world,” Biederman had said. “If it’s skewing overwhelmingly male, get out as soon as possible.” It was a nice afternoon, therefore, to linger.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CAPITALISM DEPT.

HIGH-WATER MARKS

Prior to the launch of the annual Hedge Fund Regatta, which took place in New York Harbor one recent mild evening, Michael Fortenbaugh, the commodore of the Manhattan Sailing Club, called the competing skippers together at the marina in Battery Park City. The mood was sober, and, while pre-race tension alone might have accounted for that, the past few weeks have been stormy ones in the hedge-fund industry. “Boat No. 1—that’s the Connecticut Hedge Fund Association,” Fortenbaugh said. “No. 2—that’s Caxton Associates. No. 4: Alternative Investment Group.”

Wait a minute—what happened to boat No. 3?

“Boat No. 3 got liquidated,” Fortenbaugh said. “Bad joke.”

The Hedge Fund Regatta was founded four years ago by T. J. Dalton, a broker at the Griswold Company. “They already had an architects’ regatta and a restaurant regatta, so I thought it would be good to get a bunch of hedge-fund managers,” Dalton explained later, adding that the money raised would fund sailing programs for city youths. Dalton, who learned to sail as a boy at the Jersey Shore, said that many of his hedge-fund clients were handy with a mainsheet. “Sailing a boat is very competitive, and obviously managing money is all about competition and performance,” he said. “And it takes a lot of money to have a big boat.”

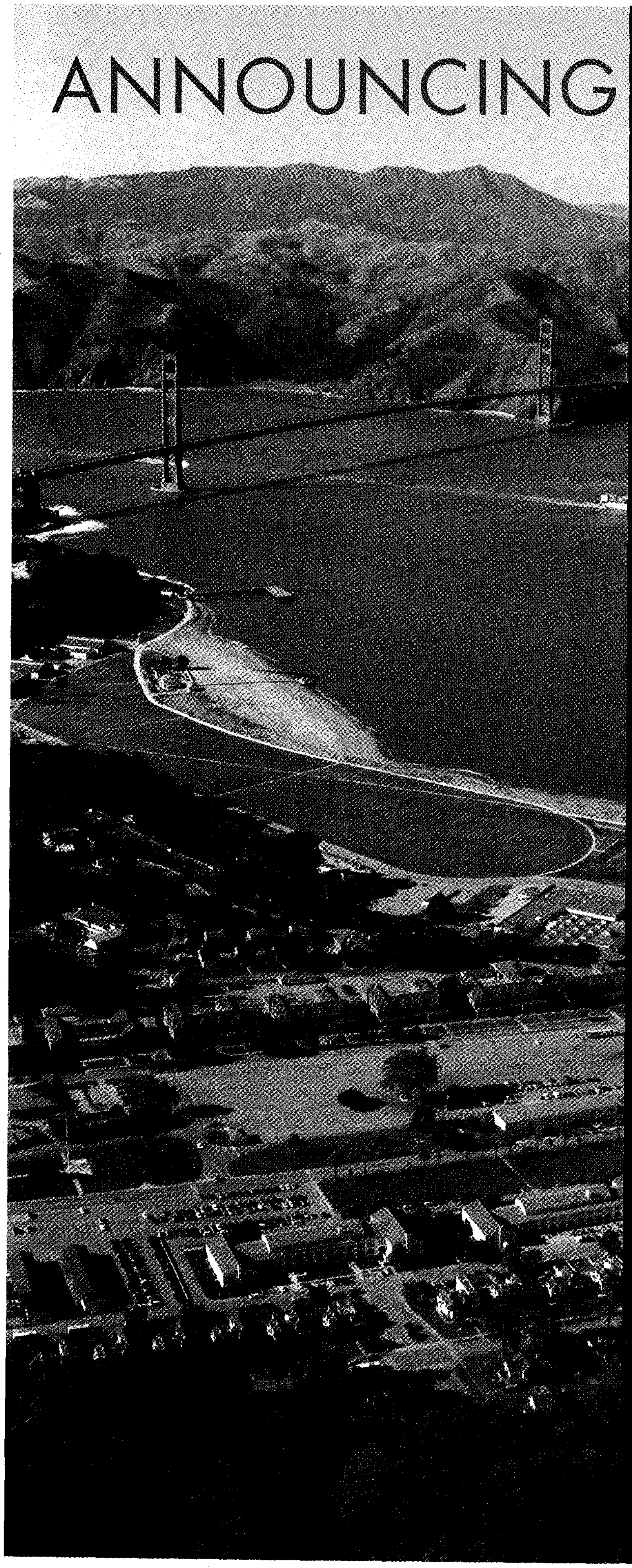
The race began at about seven, as the sun was dropping in the sky behind Ellis Island, near the floating clubhouse—essentially, a big barge equipped with a bar and a disco ball—which is moored in New York Harbor for the summer months. “The tugboats weren’t very happy when we first had recreational sailing out here, but the second year I discovered that the Captain of the Port is a sailor,” Fortenbaugh, who was dressed in a blazer trimmed with insignia, white pants, and white bucks, said as the rubber dinghy he was piloting approached the clubhouse. “Industry doesn’t want any recreation at all,” he said. “But that is not the American way.”

The guests milled about, while ancient hits by Madonna and the Jackson Five played over the imperfect sound system. “The markets have been so choppy—these guys desperately need some fresh air and beer,” Zornitza Taleva, an analyst at a company called Pioneer Alternative Investments, said as she watched the boats tacking to and fro, their spinnakers emblazoned with corporate logos. Although it was hard to tell who, exactly, was winning at any given point in the race—sailing, as a spectator sport, ranks somewhere beneath sheepherding—another analyst attempted to tie together the nautical and financial prowess of the participants. “It’s inversely correlated,” he said. “The firms that are the best sailors are too busy sailing.”

About an hour into the race, heads swerved to the starboard side of the clubhouse: the Griswold team had collided with the Caxton team, which was making a tight turn around a buoy. (The Griswold boat, rendered unseaworthy by the crash, retired to the marina.) The winner was the Connecticut Hedge Fund Association, with a crew headed by William Douglass, who is a co-founder of K2 Advisors. Fortenbaugh bestowed a jeroboam of champagne upon Douglass. “The competition out there was tough, and it’s a good thing we knew where the lucky wind would be,” Douglass said.

Soon the winning team was speeding back to Manhattan on a luxury yacht made by the Hinckley company, which, along with Moët & Chandon, was among the event’s sponsors. A crew member named Jordan Murphy, a sailing pal of Douglass’s, credited the team’s success to the yachtsmanship of its skipper. “He’s had a Swan 45, and he’s getting a Farr 40 built,” Murphy, who was seated aft, said. When asked about his own yachts, Douglass demonstrated the aversion to publicity for which his industry, in good times and turbulent ones, is renowned. “I have a few sailboats,” he acknowledged. “But we’re here to talk about raising money for kids to go sailing.” As he disembarked from the Hinckley, Douglass issued a correction. “I have just the one boat,” he hedged.

—*Rebecca Mead*



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE UNFRIENDLY SKIES

In the summer of 1999, after a series of highly publicized customer-service debacles, the nation's major airlines collectively promised Congress that they would revamp their operations, offering a "service commitment" that they dubbed "Customers First." Eight years later, airline passengers are waiting in vain for any sign of that promise's being kept. They're also waiting in vain, period. This summer, nearly a third of all flights have been arriving late, more flights have been cancelled, many planes are overbooked, and, in June, reports of baggage problems were up twenty-five per cent from last year. A service commitment like this should probably be called "Customers Last."

The airlines' explanation for the sheer misery of flying is that the important problems—bad weather and an antiquated air-traffic-control system, resulting in overcrowded runways—are out of their hands. But those unavoidable difficulties have been exacerbated by the airlines' strategic choices, most notably their decision to cut the number of workers they employ and the number of big planes they fly. Over the past six years, airlines have laid off more than a hundred thousand workers, around a sixth of their workforce, and six major carriers have shrunk their fleets—planes are expensive not only to acquire but to maintain—by twenty per cent. From an economic point of view, this was sensible. Making money in the airline business has always been tough—Warren Buffett has said that if captialists had been present at the Wright brothers' first flight they would have been well advised to shoot the plane down—but the years following 9/11, in which the industry lost more than thirty billion dollars and several airlines filed for bankruptcy, were especially brutal. So airlines moved aggressively to cut the fat out of their business, trying to insure that each of their planes flew as many flights, while carrying as many passengers, as possible. The strategy was so successful that, even as business has recovered, the airlines have chosen to stay slim. As a result, planes today are more crowded than before—last year, the airlines filled seventy-nine per cent of their seats, compared with sixty-five per cent in the mid-nineties—and forecasts suggest that the industry as a whole may clear four billion dollars in profits this year.

The lean-and-mean approach may have saved the airlines, but for passengers it's made an already bad situation worse. If something goes wrong with a plane, servicing it will likely take longer than it used to, and there's less chance that another jet will be available to get passengers where they need to go. And since the planes the airlines do own are flying more flights, the ripple effects of delays have been magnified: a third of all flight delays are due simply to the fact that the plane was late arriving from its previous flight, and often the effects of a mid-morning flight's late arrival can still be felt that evening. According to the Department of Transportation, more than a quarter of all delays in June were due to "air carrier" problems.

Oddly, none of this seems to have hurt the airlines—more people than ever are flying, and ticket prices remain relatively stable. In part, this is because, for many trips, there's no meaningful alternative to flying, which limits the power that fliers have as customers. They can make certain choices—they consistently go for the cheapest flights, making it hard for an airline to raise prices—but anyone who vows never to fly with a particular airline again will likely have an equally bad experience on a rival carrier soon afterward. Like consumers of regional utilities or like drivers who tolerate bad traffic day after day, fliers have accommodated themselves to misery. It's little wonder, then, that the air-travel market rarely punishes an individual airline for failing to get people to their destination on time: consumers assume, with good reason, that the options are interchangeably awful.

The airlines could improve the current system by investing more money in planes and staff, reducing the number of segments each plane flies in a given day, and increasing the number of direct flights. So you might expect that free-market competition would have thrown up at least one major airline promising reliable on-time arrivals in exchange for higher ticket prices—like a toll road in the air. The trouble is that although things like bad weather and air-traffic-control problems are easy excuses for the airlines' failures, they're also real problems, and any airline dedicated to keeping its on-time arrivals high could easily find its efforts, in the short run, stymied by storms or by high volume. And the punishment for an airline that explicitly promised excellent performance and failed would probably be much harsher than if it had promised nothing at all. (When JetBlue experienced huge delays this winter because of bad planning, it was savaged in the press, precisely because it had always insisted that it was different from other airlines.) Furthermore, in the short run more competition could actually make things worse for customers: it would mean more flights, a greater burden for the air-traffic-control system, and possibly more delays.

In other words, we're stuck with the current system, because it isn't really in any airline's interest to try to change it. As long as no airline makes a dedicated effort to distinguish itself from the pack, all the airlines can stay lean, even at the expense of quality. In that sense, the most honest thing about the airlines may be their advertising, which tends to emphasize the flying experience—lulling us with talk of leg room and fully reclining seats. You may end up waiting on the runway for a couple of hours, the message seems to be, but at least you'll do it in a comfortable chair.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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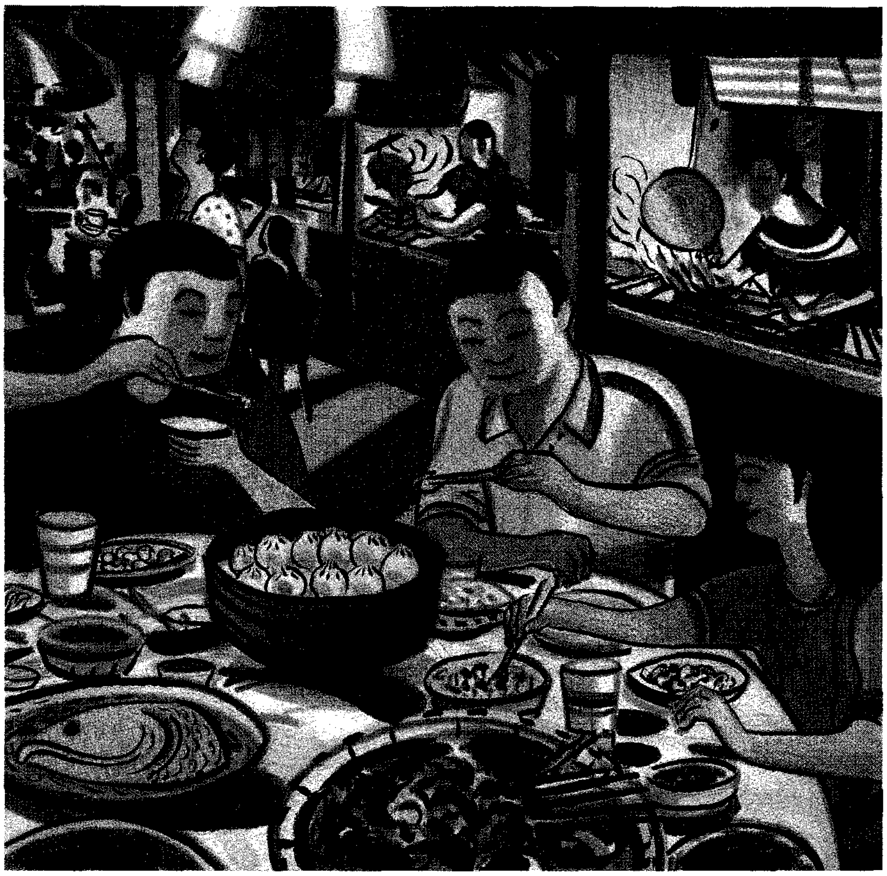
SINGAPORE JOURNAL

THREE CHOPSTICKS

Does street food make the best cuisine?

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

When I think back on the conversations that took place after I told people that I was going to Singapore to eat, I'm reminded of the scene in "Little Red Riding Hood" when the title character first encounters the big bad wolf. I play the wolf:



All over Singapore, there are open-air pavilions with up to a hundred hawker stands.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

"Singapore!" Little Red Riding Hood says, in an improbable New York accent. "But Singapore is supposed to be the least exotic place in Asia. There's nothing to see there, unless you're a connoisseur of skyscrapers or container ports or obsessive street-cleaning."

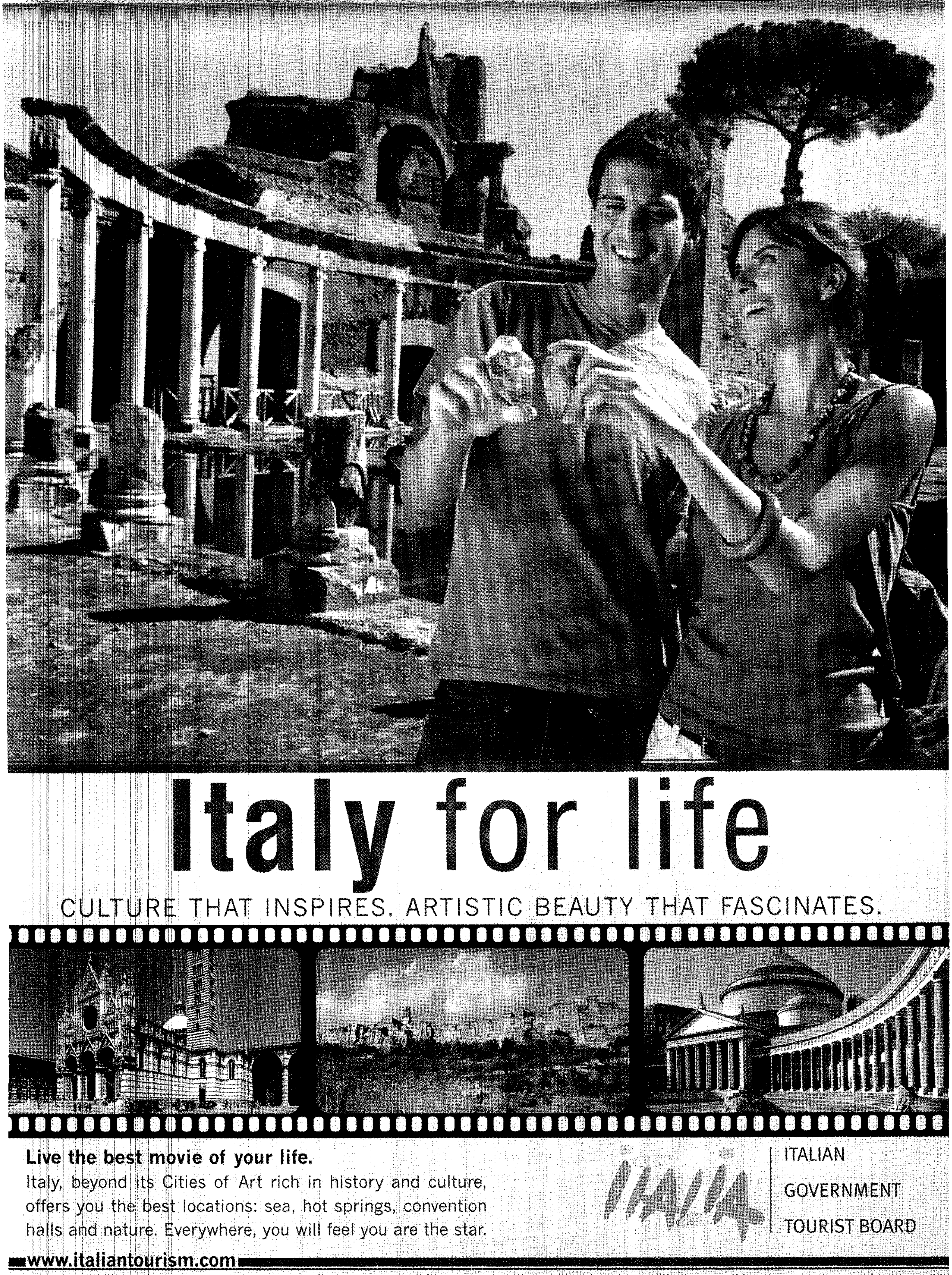
"All the better for guilt-free eating, my dear. Your meals can't be spoiled by remorse over not having conducted a thorough inspection of the second-most-important cathedral."

"And isn't Singapore the place where you can get fined for chewing gum?"

"But, my dear, you can't chew gum while you're eating anyway."

From those conversations, I have concluded that the governmental ban on chewing gum, promulgated in 1992, remains the fact most strongly associated by Americans with Singapore. If Singapore tested a nuclear device tomorrow, the stories in American newspapers would mention the gum ban by the second paragraph. (Three years ago, the government relented a bit, in order to satisfy the requirements of a free-trade agreement: you can now buy nicotine gum by prescription.) There is a collateral awareness of the penalties that Singapore imposes for such malefactions as dropping a candy wrapper on the sidewalk. According to what's listed on a widely sold souvenir T-shirt emblazoned "Singapore—A Fine City," the acts that can bring you a serious fine include not only gum-chewing and littering and smoking and spitting but also carrying a durian on a public conveyance. A durian is an astonishingly odoriferous melon, much prized in Southeast Asia. Having smelled a durian, I must say that the prohibition against carrying one on a public conveyance (for which there is actually no specific fine) strikes me as a very solid piece of legislation. In American terms, it's the equivalent of a law against carrying a cattle feedlot on a public conveyance.

I'd always thought that I wouldn't go much further than that in supporting Singapore's efforts to treat tidiness as the nearly Athenian ideal of government. Still, had I known that it was happening I would have backed the government's scheme in the seventies to bring food venders, called hawkers, off the streets and into centers that have proper sanitation and refrigeration and running water—a scheme that was inspired by a desire for tidy streets, along with public-health considerations and the needs of traffic control and, presumably, the relentless modernization that seems to have a momentum of its own in Singapore. My support would have been based on enlightened self-interest, one of the cornerstones of democracy. For years, as I've walked past food stands in foreign lands, I've struggled to keep in mind that for an American visitor the operational translation for signs that ostensibly say something like "*bhel puri*" or "*tacos de nopales*" is "Delivery System for Unfamiliar Bugs That You Will Bitterly Regret Having Ingested." The temptation to throw caution to the wind has been excruciating, since I may love street food above all other types of food. I have never figured out just why, although I've considered the possibility that, through some rare genetic oddity, my sense of taste is at full strength only when I'm standing up. (The fact that I particularly enjoy whatever I eat while standing in front of the refrigerator could be considered supporting evidence.) For a while, I thought about



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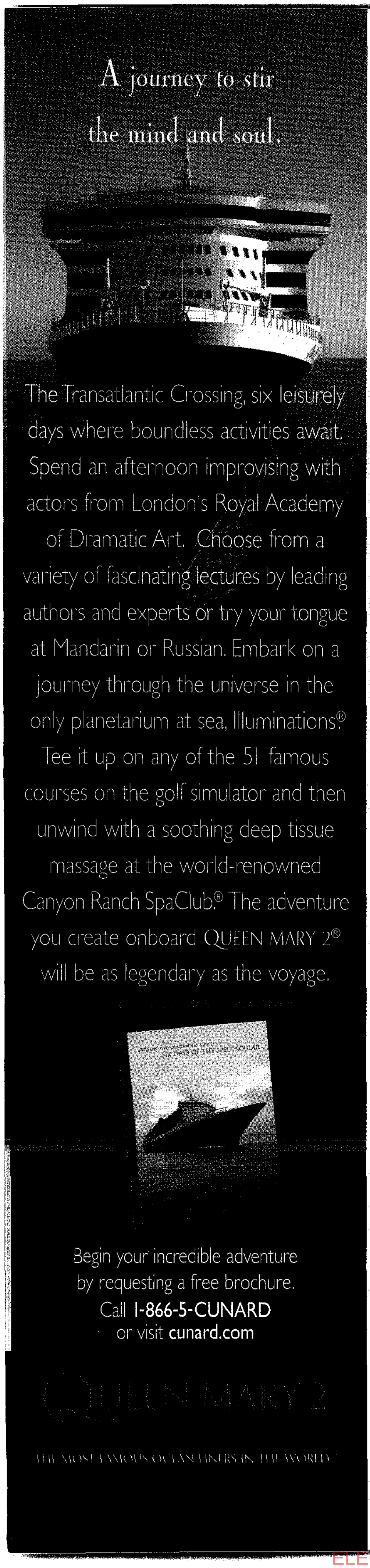

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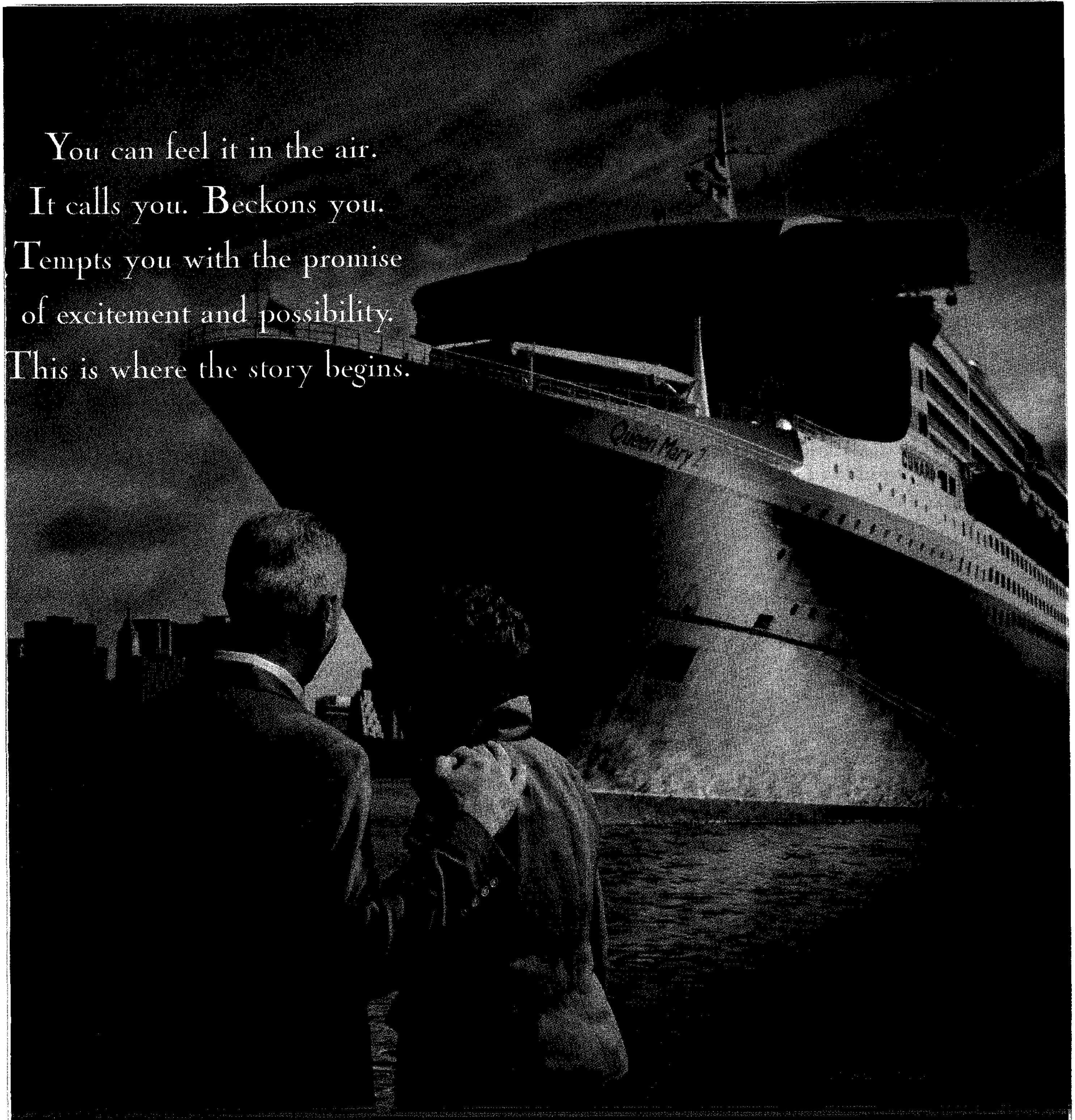
testing the standup hypothesis at some fancy Manhattan restaurant by springing to my feet halfway through the main course and trying to gauge whether that makes the roasted organic chicken with fricassée of spring vegetables and chanterelle polenta taste as good as those sausage sandwiches you get at Italian street fairs.

Gathering food venders into hawker centers, under the purview of public-health inspectors, meant that a Western visitor not only can have a safe shot at a variety of Singaporean delicacies but can do so in a setting so convenient that his energy is reserved for eating. All over Singapore, there are open-air pavilions where an island of tables and chairs is ringed by eighty or a hundred hawker stands—many of them selling only one item, like just satay or just fishball noodles. The government has established hawker centers in the central business district and hawker centers at the beach and hawker centers attached to the high-rise public-housing projects where the vast majority of Singaporeans live. In some of the fancy skyscrapers and department stores, private operators run air-conditioned, upmarket versions of hawker centers called food courts—a term presumably selected by someone who had never tasted what's passed off as food at an American shopping-mall food court. In Singapore, even the establishments called coffee shops are essentially mini hawker centers. They might have started as places that served coffee and the pastries that the British Empire, for reasons of its own, inflicted on unsuspecting colonials throughout the world, but these days the proprietor is likely to operate the drink concession himself and rent out two or three stalls to specialists in, say, fish-head curry or Hainanese chicken rice. It has become possible to eat in Singapore for days at a time without ever entering a conventional restaurant. Since I have never been much taken with the concept of courses—my eating habits are more on the order of a bit of this, a bit of that, and, now that I think of it, a bit of something else—it almost seems as if the Singapore government of forty years ago had arranged its hawker policy with me in mind.

I don't mean that I would check the flights to Heathrow if I heard that some entrepreneur in East Anglia had created a logistically flawless collection of food stands that allowed a diner to switch with ease from, say, bangers and mash to mushy peas to bubble and squeak. Convenience isn't everything. Singapore, though, has always been noted for the quality and variety of its street food and, not coincidentally, for having a citizenry whose interest in eating borders on the obsessive. The population combines migrants from several parts of China with minorities of Indians and Malays and people who look Chinese but are known as Peranakans—a separate ethnic group, long prominent in the government and business life of Singapore, which traces its origins to early Chinese traders who absorbed some of the culture and the genes of the local Malays. The evidence indicates that every one of these groups arrived hungry.

Soon, Hainanese were cooking Peranakan specialties and Indians were frying noodles in the Chinese manner. Old dishes were transmogrified. New dishes were invented. Eventually, Singaporeans were lining up at hawker stands to eat any number of dishes available only in Singapore. Even in New York, a famously polyglot city that has, for example, three restaurants specializing in the food of the Uighur people of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, a yearning for Singapore hawker food is surprisingly difficult to satisfy. (Singapore mei fun, a noodle dish often found in Chinatown restaurants, is, it almost goes without saying, unknown in Singapore.) You can find the Malaysian version of some Singaporean dishes—*asam laksa*, a terrific soup with an unlikely sour-fish taste, has some similarity to the Peranakan version of *laksa* served in hawker centers, for instance—and some dishes in Chinatown restaurants are similar to the dishes brought to Singapore from, say, Fujian or Hainan. There are, of course, some upmarket pan-Asian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places in Manhattan that do versions of street food, including Singaporean hawker food. Apparently, though, a dish that is reminiscent of what's found in Singapore serves only to make overseas Singaporeans long for the real article. Culinarily, they are among the most homesick people I have ever met.

I commiserated with a number of them this spring, when the Prime Minister's office organized a Singapore Day in Central Park. Singapore Day was supposed to be for expatriate Singaporeans and their guests, but I was among some New York feeders who wormed our way in when we heard that the festivities would include Singaporean dishes prepared by a dozen hawkers flown in for the occasion. Six thousand people stood patiently in line for a go at some food from home—completely ignoring the government exhibitions and the requisite rock band. As they waited, they spoke of the stands they head for when they can manage the eleven-thousand-mile trip to Singapore—the coffee shop in their old neighborhood that has the best *kaya* (a sort of coconut custard, served on toast), the fried-prawn-noodle stand in Marine Parade they always visit the first day back, the place with the best halal version of chicken rice. Nobody I spoke to mentioned any restaurants. Even though the hawkers complained that they couldn't get all of the proper ingredients in New York, the tastes I had of *roti prata* (a sort of Indian crêpe with dipping sauce) and *chwee kueh* (rice cakes topped with bits of fried preserved radish) and *char kway teow* (a dense fried rice-noodle dish that includes, among other ingredients, eggs and Chinese sausages and cockles and chives and fried lard) and *laksa* confirmed the wisdom of my plan to go to Singapore to eat.

The hawkers who came to New York had been handpicked by K. F. Seetoh, a Singaporean of Cantonese descent, whose connection to hawker food is similar, on a smaller scale, to the connection the France family has had with stock-car racing: that is, he managed to recognize a lot of scattered, unexalted activity as a cultural force and figured out how to merchandise it. An energetic, self-assured man in his mid-forties, with a hint of blond in his hair, Seetoh, as he's known to everybody, began his career as a photographer. But his avocation—which is eating, since he is a lifelong resident of Singapore—eventually became his profession. He started in 1998 by putting together a hawker-food guide called "Makansutra," *makan* being the Malay word for "eat" or "food." The guide lists what Seetoh considers the best stands for about a hundred and forty traditional hawker dishes—the best being all that any book would have room for, since Singapore has what Seetoh estimates to be about twelve thousand stands in the government hawker centers alone. The ratings are on a chopstick scale, with the most distinguished stands receiving three pairs of chopsticks. Seetoh's business card now identifies him as the chief executive and "makan guru" of a company that is also called Makansutra. He puts out other Southeast Asian food guides, appears on television, and does consultancies. He even presides over a small collection of hawker stands in the slick marina area that's part of Singapore's modernistic performing-arts center—a building that, because of its shape (though not, presumably, its smell), is sometimes referred to by the locals as the Durian. Seetoh is helped in these endeavors by his wife, Patricia. Although Patricia says that before meeting her husband she ate mostly sandwiches and French fries, she comes from a Peranakan family that had good food as a priority. According to the Seetohs, when Patricia's father was on his deathbed he whispered something that made his family gather closer, thinking that he had some final instructions or blessings to impart. What he was saying turned out to be "*laksa*." They brought him a bowl of it.

"*I've found someone else who thinks I'm really attractive.*"

Seetoh and I had become acquainted when he was in New York for Singapore Day. The next evening, at one of the sophisticated Southeast Asian places that he'd wanted to try, the Seetohs and I sampled some of the Singaporean dishes on the menu and he responded more or less the way you'd expect a barbecue nut from Tennessee to respond to what was advertised as a pulled-pork-shoulder sandwich in, say, Helsinki or Leeds. He was moved to describe the authentic Singaporean *nasi lemak* and the authentic Singaporean chili crab I'd eat when I got to Singapore. Given the fact that I wouldn't have thrown rocks at what we'd just eaten, I could hardly wait to sample the three-chopstick versions. I told Seetoh that I'd be in Singapore as soon as I could arrange it.

In Singapore, it was clear from the moment Seetoh picked me up at my hotel that, as interested as he was in authenticity and quality, pure capacity would also be an issue. He is an enthusiast. For Seetoh, there's always another noodle dish around the corner.

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He's quite willing to admit that there is plenty of mediocre hawker food in Singapore, but superior hawker fare renders him rhapsodic. The icon chart in "Makansutra" translates two and a half pairs of chopsticks—one notch below the top—as "Divine." Three pairs of chopsticks means "Die, Die Must Try!," which has become a sort of motto for Seetoh and his enterprises. It's a direct translation, he says, of a Cantonese phrase that means, more or less, "to die for." In addition to Cantonese and Mandarin and Malay and Hokkien, Seetoh speaks idiomatic English plus Singlish, a slangy local patois that is spoken only idiomatically. He speaks all of these languages rapidly.

"We won't know till they're older which one is the evil twin."

Working mainly from my samplings at Singapore Day and from dishes that had been labelled "Popular Local Favorite" in the 2007 edition of "Makansutra," I'd come up with a preliminary list of dishes that I considered, well, must try. There were nine: *chwee kueh* (the rice cakes with radish), grilled stingray, *roti prata*, curry puffs (which Seetoh describes as, more or less, a Chinese improvement on an Indian samosa), chili crab (and its cousin, pepper crab), *laksa*, fish-head curry, carrot cake (which would startle someone who'd meant to order the dessert you might get in the sort of restaurant whose waitresses slouch around in sandals: it's fried white radish and flour cake, with garlic and eggs and scallions and other vegetables), and *charkway teow*. Seetoh looked disappointed.

"Wrong list?" I asked.

Not wrong. Insufficient. I had left out Hokkien fried-prawn noodles. I had left out *otah*—fish paste, mixed with chilies, folded into a coconut leaf, and grilled. I had left out *rojak*—a sort of salad that's held together with a sauce the color and consistency of Mexican *mole*, unless you get the Indian rather than the Chinese version, which is totally different and, of course, a must-try item. I hadn't mentioned *mee siam*, a Thai-sounding noodle dish that is not available in Thailand. I hadn't mentioned fish-ball noodles—which is odd, since I am devoted to fish balls. I hadn't even mentioned *bak kut teh*, a simple pork-ribs soup that is, improbably, considered a breakfast treat. (Eventually, Seetoh and I had some *bak kut teh* for breakfast—in a place next to the port that is said to be the busiest in the world—and I can say unequivocally that it beats Cheerios by a mile.) I had left out *popiah*, a Hokkien-style spring roll that includes stewed turnips. By the time we reached the Maxwell Road Hawker Centre—near where Makansutra has an office, in a row of colonial-era three-story buildings known as shop-houses—my list had about twenty items, and for the next few days every hawker center seemed to remind Seetoh of a dish I had to try before I went home. "You can't leave without having it," Seetoh would say, when he instructed me to add another dish to my list. "It'll knock your socks off."

Sampling what Seetoh considers the very best rendition of each dish required some travelling around town—a remarkable chicken rice here, an amazing *chwee kueh* there, a mind-blowing *laksa* somewhere else. At one center, though—the modestly named Old Airport Road Temporary Food Centre, which was serving a public-housing project during some construction that's part of an ambitious, ten-year hawker-center upgrading program that the government launched in 2001—we were in the presence of three venders who had been designated by Seetoh as hawker masters. There, without descending into the realm of the merely divine, you can start with *rojak*, then tear into some chili crab, and then decide whether you might want to end the evening with Hokkien fried-prawn noodles or have the chili-crab specialist do a pepper crab as a change of pace before you end the evening with Hokkien fried-prawn noodles. I had no doubt that I was indeed eating the food

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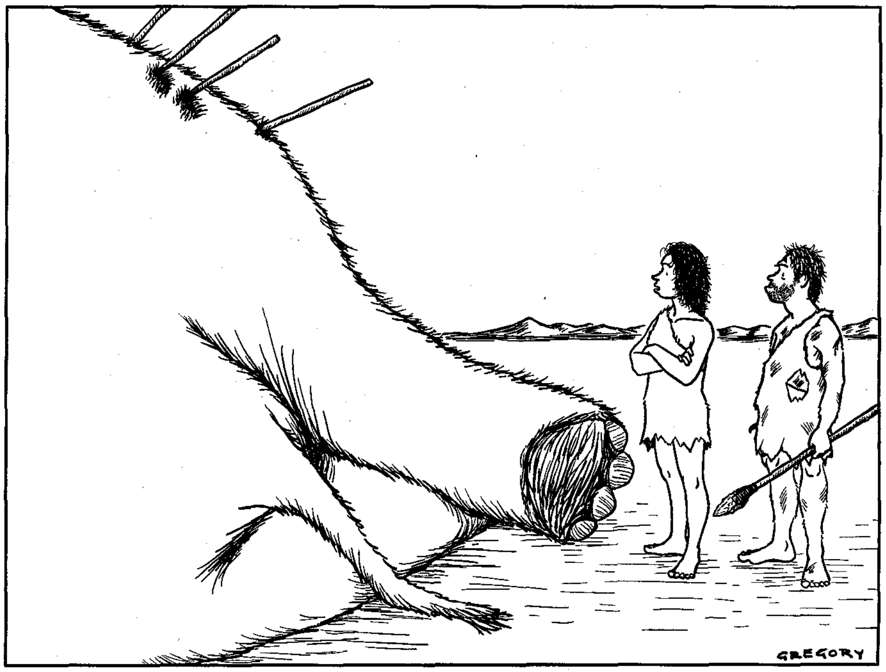
of masters. In fact, while eating at the Old Airport Road Temporary Food Centre I realized that it was incorrect to think that my taste buds operated at full strength only when I was standing: we were eating this food while sitting at a table, after all, and it was knocking my socks off. One of the principles of scientific inquiry is that even an elegant hypothesis has to be abandoned if irrefutable evidence to the contrary is encountered.

Seetoh seemed quite confident about his selection of the very best stand for each hawker dish, but, as I had learned from the people I'd met at Singapore Day—people whom Seetoh had described as "deprived and depraved"—a Singaporean devotee of hawker food doesn't have to be the author of a food guide to be absolutely certain that he knows where to find the best version of just about anything. One evening, while we were eating some fish-head curry—a dish that in Singapore includes an entire snapper head staring up through the curry sauce—a friend of Seetoh's named Daniel Wang shook his head sadly when he heard where Seetoh had taken me for *char kway teow.* Wang, who retired in 2004 as Singapore's director general of public health, happened to be the Ministry of the Environment engineer put in charge of building the original hawker centers, in the seventies. At his retirement, he had just presided over a $2.5-million upgrading of a beach venue called the East Coast Lagoon Hawker Centre, which was turned into something so reminiscent of a tropical resort that Seetoh refers to it as "Daniel's Club Med." Wang's contribution to hawker centers can be seen as a monument to enlightened self-interest: given his line of work, he's quite conscious of hygiene, but he happens to be crazy about hawker food, particularly *char kway teow.* As a schoolboy, Wang regularly observed the cooking technique of a particular *char kway teow* hawker, and he remains loyal to that hawker's son—a vender who had learned well from his father, Wang explained, how to cook the noodles in lard to keep them from sticking and how to make his stock from prawns and squid and precisely when to sprinkle on white pepper. Dismissing the suggestion that childhood nostalgia might be making him a less than objective judge, Wang went on to extoll the *popiah* produced by a hawker who had not been among the five *popiah* hawkers listed in "Makansutra."

Wang was so enthusiastic about the snubbed *popiah* that there was nothing to do but go to the Newton Food Centre and give it a try, as soon as we had polished off the fish-head curry. At the



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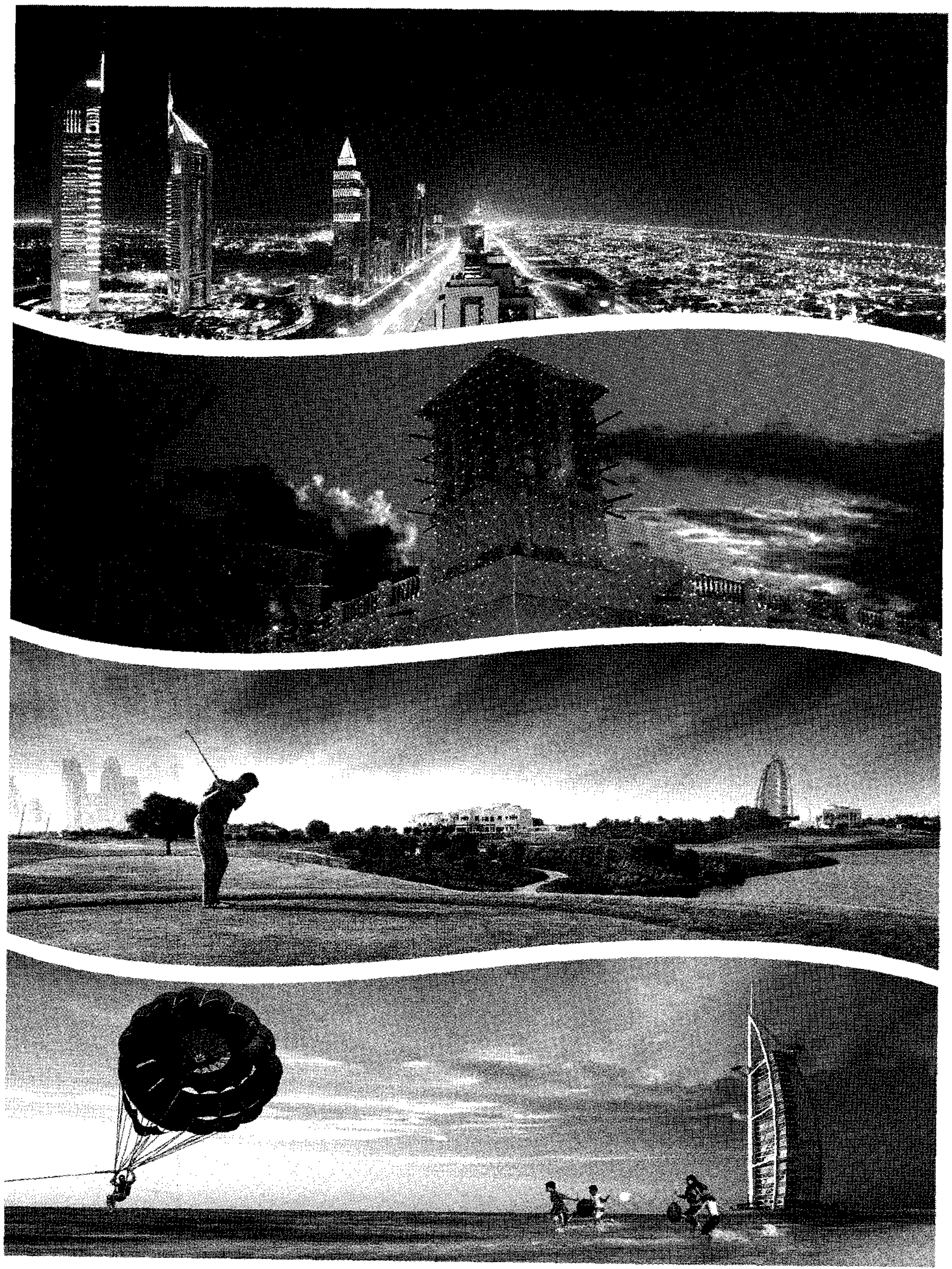

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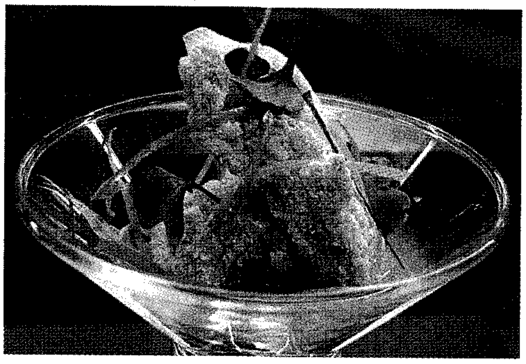

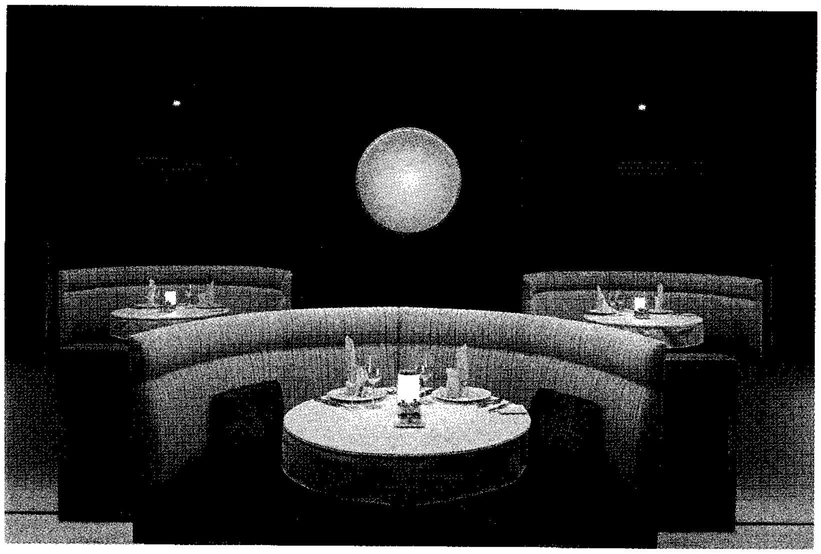

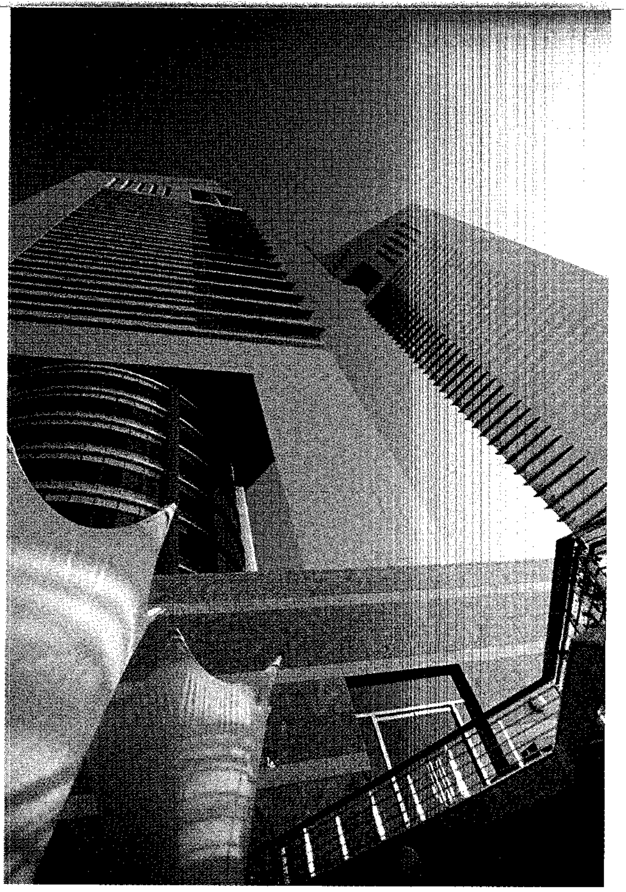

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SPECIALTY DISH ©BERNADETTE CHIN; EMIRATES TOWERS ©NEIL EMMERSON/GETTY IMAGES; VU'S RESTAURANT PHOTO COURTESY OF JUMEIRAH EMIRATES TOWERS

TO DINE FOR

Dining experiences rarely fall short of spectacular in Dubai. Fresh ingredients are a citywide standard, transforming even the local fast-food staple—the famous *shawarma* sandwich—into a delectable culinary experience. This savory mix of grilled shavings of lamb or chicken and salad, rolled inside a pocket of Arabic bread, is a favorite of both locals and visitors.

Coffee is considered to be part of a traditional Arabic welcome. Flavored with cardamom and other spices, it's served in tiny cups—men are expected to accept three rounds, while women can get by with one. The famous Turkish coffee, thick and sweet, is commonly served in restaurants and lounges.

Restaurants are a microcosm of global cuisine, including Gulf and Middle Eastern, Indian, Filipino, Thai, Chinese, Japanese, French, Italian, and Mexican. Lebanese specialties are the highlight of the menus at **Al Nafoorah** in the Emirates Towers and **Al Mijana** in Le Meridien Dubai. The open-air, creek-side **Fatafeet Café**, near the British Embassy, is as popular for its Egyptian cuisine as it is for its *shishas* (water pipes). For a flat rate, diners get their own water pipe, hot coals, and a pile of flavored tobacco to enjoy, such as strawberry, apple, or cinnamon. In the Grand Hyatt Hotel, a sophisticated Eastern experience awaits at **Indochine**, which is renowned for its superb Vietnamese dishes. For more informal fare, diners head downtown to the Bur Dubai and Deira districts to enjoy Indian and Pakistani curry houses, or to indulge in a spicy tandoori feast at **Ravi's** on Satwa High Street.

Hotel restaurants have a near monopoly on local liquor licenses, and consequently they tend to be highly popular dining spots. In the Hilton Dubai Creek, the prestigious **Verre**, Gordon Ramsay's own Middle Eastern outpost of French cuisine, has won international acclaim for its modern European menu. On the fiftieth floor of the Emirates Towers, **Vu's** serves delectable European dishes in a stylishly appointed setting with top-of-the-world views.

After a meal of regional specialties, from the familiar hummus and baba ghanoush to the exotic *qouzi*—a special-occasion dish of whole roast lamb on a bed of rice—desserts and pastries are often served on large, round platters. *Umm ali*, a traditional Egyptian bread pudding; *eish es seray*, golden bread soaked in honey and syrup; and *muhallabia*, a milk pudding made with rose water, are just some of the sweet finishes available to please the palate.

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Newton Centre, Seetoh was barely polite about the *popiah* and Wang did not pursue the matter, having become caught up in a discussion of a sort of oyster omelette that we'd picked up from a nearby stall. I assumed that the *popiah* discussion was at an end. The next evening, though, while the Seetohs and I were on the way to the East Coast Lagoon Hawker Centre to have some salted vegetable and duck soup (a dish that has replaced French fries in Patricia Seetoh's pantheon), Seetoh pulled up in front of a shopping mall called the Shaw Centre. While we waited in the car, Patricia ducked in to get some *popiah*, so that I could understand what a divine—or maybe even a die-die-must-try—*popiah* is like. In Singapore, I should have realized, a discussion about the relative merits of various *popiah* stands is never at an end.

The more we ate, the longer my list got. We couldn't seem to stay even. On my last evening, while we consumed some *mee siam* and the Indian version of *rojak* with Daniel Wang and a couple of his friends, Seetoh was still lamenting the dishes I hadn't had—steamboat (a sort of hot pot) and a Malay noodle dish called *mee rebus* and *lontong* (an Indonesian dish of rice cakes with tofu and vegetables simmered in a coconut curry) and *nasi briyani* (a dish of Middle Eastern origin) and a Hakka tofu dish called *yong tau foo* and Indian *mee goring*. One of Wang's guests said that when she gets back to Singapore on the flight that arrives around dawn she stops for *kueh chap* before she even goes home—*kueh chap* being a bowl of broth with sheets of rice-flour noodles served with pig intestines, or what Wang calls "spare parts." Seetoh said, almost apologetically, that he hadn't taken me to a *kueh chap* stand, and I said, "My mother used to say that it's always good to save something for the next trip."

I was, indeed, thinking about the next trip as I studied my list on the plane home. I deeply regretted having had *char kway teow* only once, for instance, and I didn't see how I was going to repair that deficit without returning to Singapore. I was also thinking of how convenient it would be if other cities—New York, for instance—had hawker centers serving the local specialties. New York's current mayor does not disdain tidiness, after all, and New York mayors have thought of street venders as congestion at least since the reign of Fiorello LaGuardia, who gathered some of them in places like the Essex Street Market.

A hawker center could be set up by the next time the Seetohs visited New York. I could imagine us at a place that looks a bit like the East Coast Lagoon Hawker Centre, Daniel's Club Med, although it would overlook the Hudson rather that the Strait of Singapore. There's a stand selling Italian-sausage sandwiches, of course, and a stand selling Vietnamese *banh mi* sandwiches. The Mayor has persuaded the *dosa* man of Washington Square to come into the operation and leave the Washington Square cart in the hands of a trusted cousin. There are stands run by the venders from the Red Hook ball fields—one selling *pupusas* and one selling ceviche and one selling Honduran tacos. A couple of Belgian French-fry venders are there, with fries good enough to make Patricia Seetoh consider reverting to her former eating habits. The Mayor's people have persuaded the legendary Arepa Lady of Jackson Heights to give up the chancy weather of Roosevelt Avenue for the Hudson River Hawker Center. There's a jerk-chicken stand and two competing falafel stands. I've been in nearly constant movement between our table and the venders all evening, bringing back, say, bocconcini or two kinds of fish balls—the plain ones and the ones with meat at the center, familiar from Eldridge Street noodle-soup restaurants like Sheng Wang and the exquisitely named Young City Fish Balls. Seetoh is saying that he's getting a bit full, and reminds me that he and Patricia have to get up early for the long flight back to Singapore. "But you haven't had a calzone yet," I say. "You haven't had a zeppole. We still haven't gotten you a classic New York pastrami sandwich, not to speak of a knish. I'm not talking about one of those nasty commercial knishes that look like vinyl coin purses. I'm talking about an authentic New York potato knish. You can't go home without eating a knish. It'll knock your socks off." ♦

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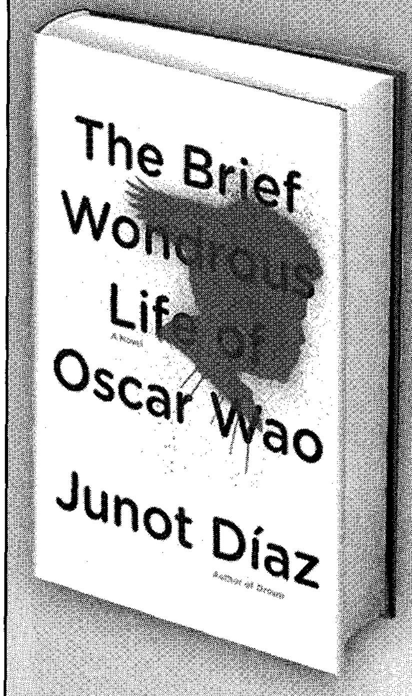

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FAMILY DINNER

RATIONED

ANTHONY RUSSO

In the days of my adolescence, my parents returned from work around 3:45 P.M., and the family dinner was held at four o'clock. The radio was always on for the four-o'clock news, featuring international disasters and domestic socialist successes. During the meal, my sister and I were subjected to an interrogation on school matters; we were never allowed to eat in silence, let alone read or watch television. Whatever conversation we could muster had to be terminated in time for the weather forecast at four-twenty-five; dinner was over at four-thirty, by which time we were obliged to have finished everything on our plates and to have thanked our mother for her efforts.

Although my sister and I were invariably given the biggest and best morsels, we experienced our family meals as a means of parental oppression. We always complained: the soup was too salty, peas were served too often, the weather forecaster was obviously lying. For the two of us, the ideal dining experience involved *ćevapi* (grilled skin sausages, a kind of Bosnian fast food), comic books, loud music, television, and the absence of our parents. It was only once I was in the Army that I grasped the metaphysics of family meals and understood that the food was prepared over the low but steady fire of love.

In October, 1983, at the age of nineteen, I was conscripted into the Yugoslav People's Army. I served my time in Štip, a town in eastern Macedonia that was home to both the military barracks and a bubble-gum factory. I was in the infantry, where the main training method was a kind of ceaseless debasement that began with the way we were fed. At mealtime, we'd line up on the vast tarmac for roll call, then march into the cafeteria, unit by unit, where we'd slide our sticky trays along the rails, each of us trying to solicit bigger portions from the pitiless kitchen staff. Our menu choices were fantastically limited. For breakfast, we got a piece of dry bread, a boiled egg, a packet of rancid margarine, and occasionally a slice of gooey, unsmoked bacon; we washed it all down with tepid sweet tea or decondensed milk in plastic cups that had been absorbing grease for all eternity. Lunch always required the use of a spoon; our favorite dish was a thick bean soup—complete with tiny sprouts that looked exactly like maggots—because it was filling and set us up for an encyclopedia of fart jokes. Dinner consisted of modified lunch leftovers, unless it was lunch all over again, plus a cup of prune-based bowel-movement potion. There was never time for conversation; we had to devour the grub quickly and then make way for the next ravenous unit.

Those were the good meals. We longed for them after we were deployed to the arid Macedonian plains, where we rehearsed for battles and slurped indefinable concoctions out of canteens or munched on the contents of our M.R.E.s: stale crackers, ancient cans of tuna, impenetrable dried fruit. Perpetually hungry, I often recalled my family dinners before I went to sleep, constructing elaborate menus that featured roast lamb or ham-and-cheese crêpes or my mother's spinach pie.

Besides tough-loving us boys into manhood, the Army was supposed to be one big family, a community bound by loyalty, comradeship, and sharing. But you never shared a goody-laden package from home or left any food in your locker; in military dorms, pilfering was encouraged as a form of preparation for pillaging in future wars. What you couldn't eat alone you traded for clean socks and shirts, for an extra shower or a daytime fire-watch shift. Food was a survival commodity.

One soldier in my unit went on a hunger strike. The officers ignored him, assuming that he was bluffing. Like everyone else, he was required to be present for each roll call and the subsequent meal. Suddenly he had a lot of close friends who were eager not to let his food go to waste. After a while, he became too weak to walk; he had to be carried to meals by two soldiers. The lucky men fought over his boiled egg while he smiled with his eyes closed, his gaunt cheek laid on the table.

A few months after my conscription, my mother and sister undertook a two-day trip from Sarajevo to visit me. By then, I was deployed in Kičevo, in western Macedonia. The weather was dismal, so we spent the visit at their hotel. Mother had brought along a suitcase full of food: veal schnitzels, fried chicken, spinach pie, even a custard cake. She spread a towel on the bed, as there was no table, and I ate from plastic containers. The first bite of spinach pie—that sublime blend of spinach and eggs and phyllo pastry—brought tears to my eyes.

—*Aleksandar Hemon*

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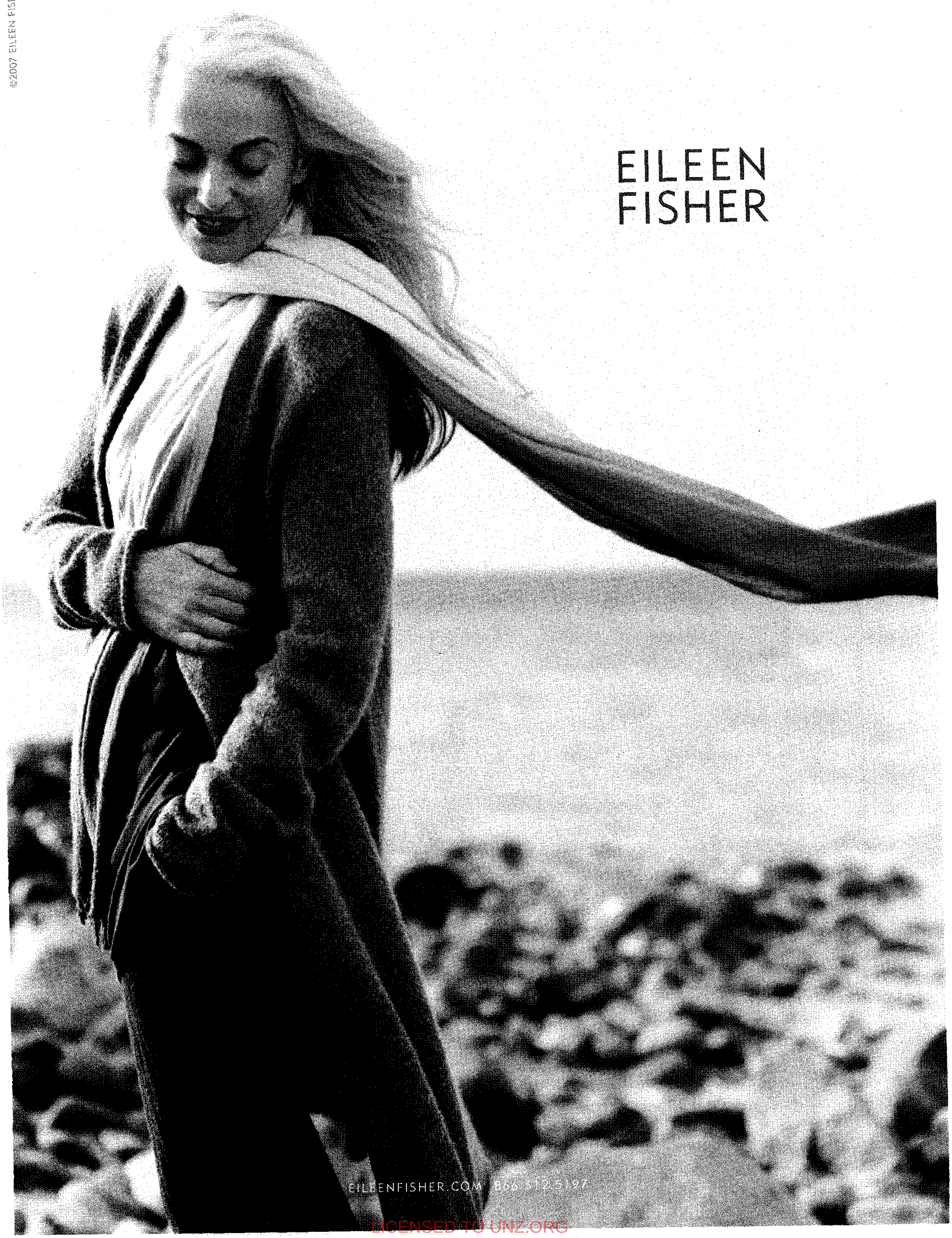
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ANNALS OF AGRICULTURE

NEW YORK LOCAL

Eating the fruits of the five boroughs.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Twelve-thirty on a beautiful summer day, and the chicken committee of the City Chicken Project is meeting at the Garden of Happiness, in the Crotona neighborhood of the Bronx. The chicken committee is devoted to the proliferation of egg-laying chickens in the outer boroughs, giving hens to people and having them raise the birds in community gardens and eat and even sell the eggs ("passing on the gift," as this is called in the project), and thereby gain experience of chicken, eggs, and community—or fowl, food, and fellowship, as one of the more alliterative-minded organizers has said. It is the pet program of Just Food, a small organization that is administered by a startlingly young-looking woman named Jacquie Berger, who is silently monitoring the proceedings.

The Garden of Happiness is a sunny community garden with vegetable plots, a chicken coop, a corrugated-tin shed, and a few chairs beneath a grape arbor, where the chicken committee is meeting. The chicken committee is a lot more committee than chicken, its deliberations filled with references to "existing chicken situations" and "pursuit of newer egg opportunities," and the slightly skeptical neighborhood people have to be gently won over by the carefully beaming professionals. They provide the nudging, let's-get-back-on-track counsel that chicken-caring community organizers have to give potentially disorganized community chicken-carers.

"It's, like, a long questionnaire, you know?" one of the neighborhood people says, about a form to be handed out to potential chicken-carers.

"Well, don't you think that someone who isn't prepared to fill out a few questions isn't—don't you have to question their commitment to caring for a chicken over the winter?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But it's a long thing. All these questions."

The Garden of Happiness has the semi-magical ability, common to any place in the city with trees and plants and animals, to secede from its environment and become what most of the world is, a bit out in the country somewhere. A hen in the coop starts clucking. A scruffy pit bull in a neighboring yard begins to growl and then bark. Undiscouraged, the hen goes on clucking, and a second hen joins her. Together they drown out the dog. The sun shines down through the arbor on the chicken committee, and the animal sounds drown out its complicated pleadings.

I had come to the Garden of Happiness not only to see a New York City

David Graves is the originator and keeper of rooftop beehives all over the city. Photograph by Josef Astor.

"WILL WE BE ABLE TO AFFORD COLLEGE AND TAKE TRIPS LIKE THIS? WHAT IF THERE'S LAW SCHOOL? OR MED SCHOOL? WOULD THOSE BE CONSIDERED ROCKS OR BOULDERS?"

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chicken committee in operation but also to get myself a chicken. This was why, a few moments later, I was trying to arrange, privately, for a hit on a fowl. Getting a chicken that has been raised and slaughtered in New York City is harder than it might seem, laws and bylaws entangling the transaction: I wanted to eat a chicken that had been raised in the city, and insiders who cannot be named said that, though the City Chickens are raised strictly for their eggs, in private a poultry whacking could be arranged, for a price. I had been set up with a chicken keeper I'll call Freddie.

"Looks like you've got, you know, chickens," I said, sidling up to him in what I imagined to be the best Washington Square marijuana-buying manner, as we stared at his coop.

"Yeah." Long pause.

Euphemism, I saw, would get you only so far in the poultry-whacking game. "I was wondering if maybe, on Friday or Saturday, you could get me a chicken," I said. "You know. The kind that people can eat." I tried to give the words a Soprano-like significance.

"Yeah, I understand," Freddie said, not making eye contact. Another long silence.

"So." I took a deep breath. "So, uh, you think there'll be a chicken?"

After another pause, he said, with exactly the kind of ominous serenity you want in a hit man, "Why not? Come on Saturday. You be there. There'll be a chicken."

I felt unreasonably pleased with myself; the chicken was going to be hit, and I would pay for the action.

I was arranging to kill a Bronx chicken as part of a project that I had begun a month or so before—to spend a week eating only food grown or raised within the five boroughs of New York City. "Localism" (or "locavore" eating, as it's sometimes called) is, as many people now know, a movement that has rules, Web pages, and books devoted to it. Its central idea is that one should try to eat only things grown within a narrow "foodshed" around one's own home, and in the past year localism has been the subject of a couple of folksy, how-we-did-it books, records of how their authors nailed down their diet to the local goods: "Plenty," by Alisa Smith and J. B. Mackinnon, which recounts the authors' yearlong experience of eating only from a foodshed around their Vancouver home, and "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle," by Barbara Kingsolver, which tells of a similar dogmatic diet, undertaken for a year around Kingsolver's house in southwest Virginia.

The point of localism is to encourage sustainable agriculture by eating things that nearby friends and farmers grow or raise and that don't have to be shipped halfway around the world, guzzling fossil fuel, to get to your table. The rules generally involve eating within a radius of a hundred or sometimes three hundred miles, and are undertaken in places, like Berkeley and the Pacific Northwest, that have a lot of nice produce and plump animals within their circles.

You go local in Berkeley, you're gonna eat. I had been curious to see what might happen if you tried to squeeze food out of what looked mostly like bricks and steel girders and shoes in trees. I wanted to do it partly to see if it could be done (as an episode of what would be called on ESPN "X-treme Localism"), partly as a way of exploring the economics and aesthetics of localism more generally, and partly to see if perhaps the implicit anti-urban prejudices lurking in the localist movement could be leached away by some city-bred purposefulness. If you could eat that way here, you could do it anywhere.

I enlisted Gabrielle Langholtz, of the Greenmarket, a young woman of awe-inspiring purposefulness, and she at once came up with a list of possibilities: vegetables from farms in Staten Island and Brooklyn, honey from rooftops, and eggs seemed plausible, too. It was the other proteins, she noted, that would be the problem, and this had led me to the chicken committee, which led me to Freddie.

We began with honey. David Graves is the originator and keeper of the rooftop beehives of New York City, and he tends fifteen hives and colonies around town. His rooftop honey is one of the ornaments of the Greenmarkets, and so he is a walking human-interest story, who trails his newsclips behind him as bees do their sun dance. We were looking at a rooftop vegetable garden, on the eastern fringe of SoHo, that belonged to the film producer Chris Goode and his wife, Lisa. The garden, which stretches across the entire rooftop, just under the watchful gaze of the old clock on the old Police Building (which stopped a couple of months ago, one of its faces at three-forty, the other at four-thirty-five), grows tomatoes and basil and zucchini and squash and green beans and watermelon—enough for a SoHo sect of survivalists. It also hosts one of Dave's beehives.

"It could be a little strange if the bees swarmed," Dave admitted. I had asked if his bees ever alarmed anyone. "I mean, that could be a little unnerving to people on a city street. It's not dangerous at all, but it would look like hell—a bunch of bees swarming around a stoplight."

Bees, he explained, fly about two to three miles each day in search of nectar and then return to the hive. In New York, they favor the nectar of gingko, sumac, linden, a tree called Chinese Scholar, and Japanese knotweed. New York honeybees live for around forty-five days, and their queen for around two or three years. "New York honeybees have the same life span as other honeybees, but they work longer hours," he said. "You can get between sixty and a hundred and forty pounds of honey per season from one rooftop hive. My record is a hundred and forty, from a hive on the Upper West Side."

The beehive sits at the center of the roof. Dave opened it, cautiously, and we looked in together.

It was like looking down into a New York office building from above: several thousand bad-tempered co-workers racing around and muttering. Dave tasted the honey. "That's linden," he said. It was New York honey: strong, spicy, and extremely sweet. He looked slightly abashed. "I didn't use to like the taste of it. And it's definitely not the Berkshires."

There was a time, not so long ago, when New York City was far more self-sufficient in food. As Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias document in their fascinating book "Of Cabbages and Kings County," Brooklyn not only was the breadbasket of the city, well into the late nineteenth century, but also made a quick, successful agricultural right turn, replacing grain with intensive vegetable and fruit cultivation. It was only with the coming of the truck farms in New Jersey and other points

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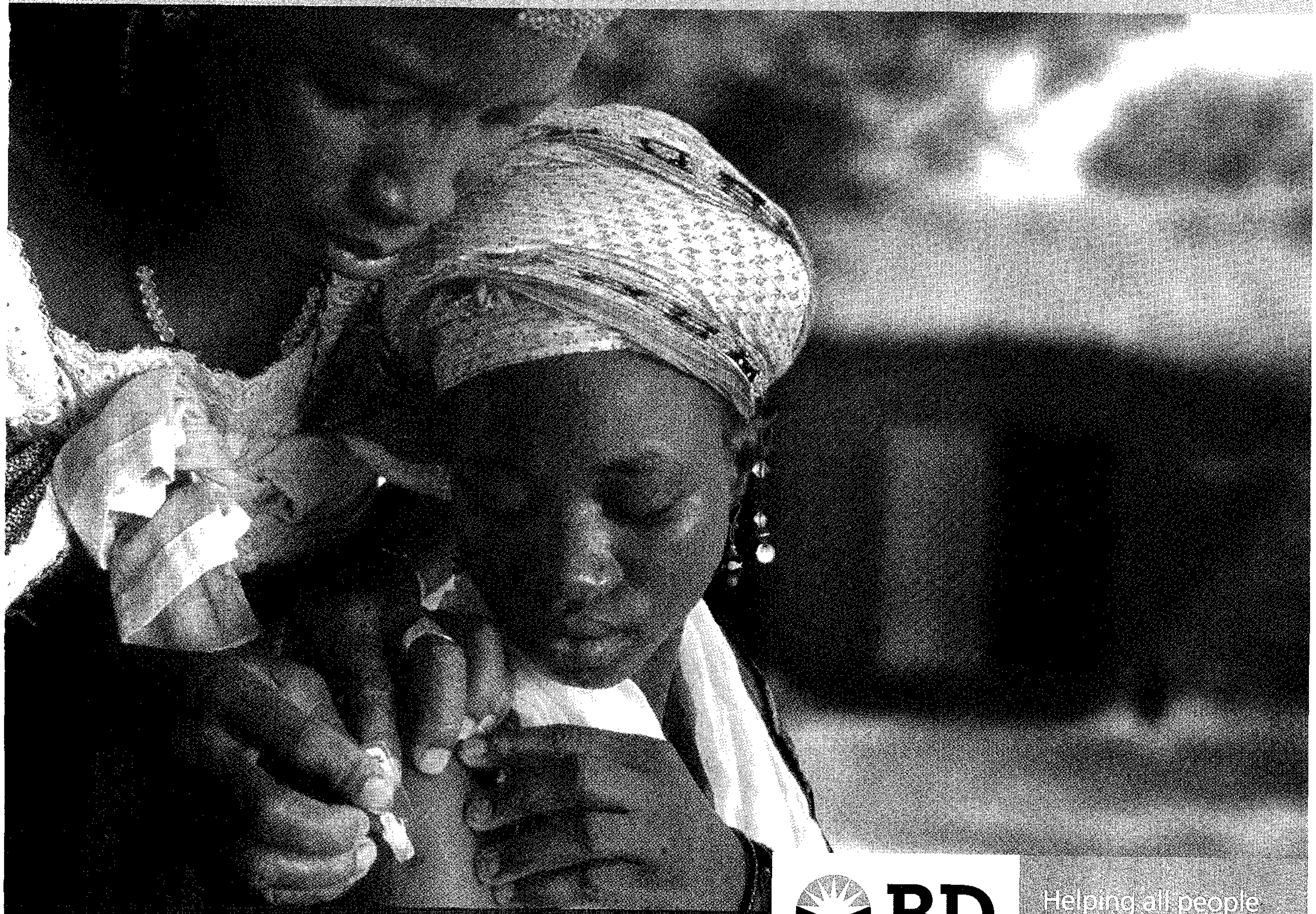

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[1] World Health Organization/UNICEF, 2002 data.

[2] "America's Most Admired Companies" annual survey, 2005; *FORTUNE* magazine, March 7, 2005.

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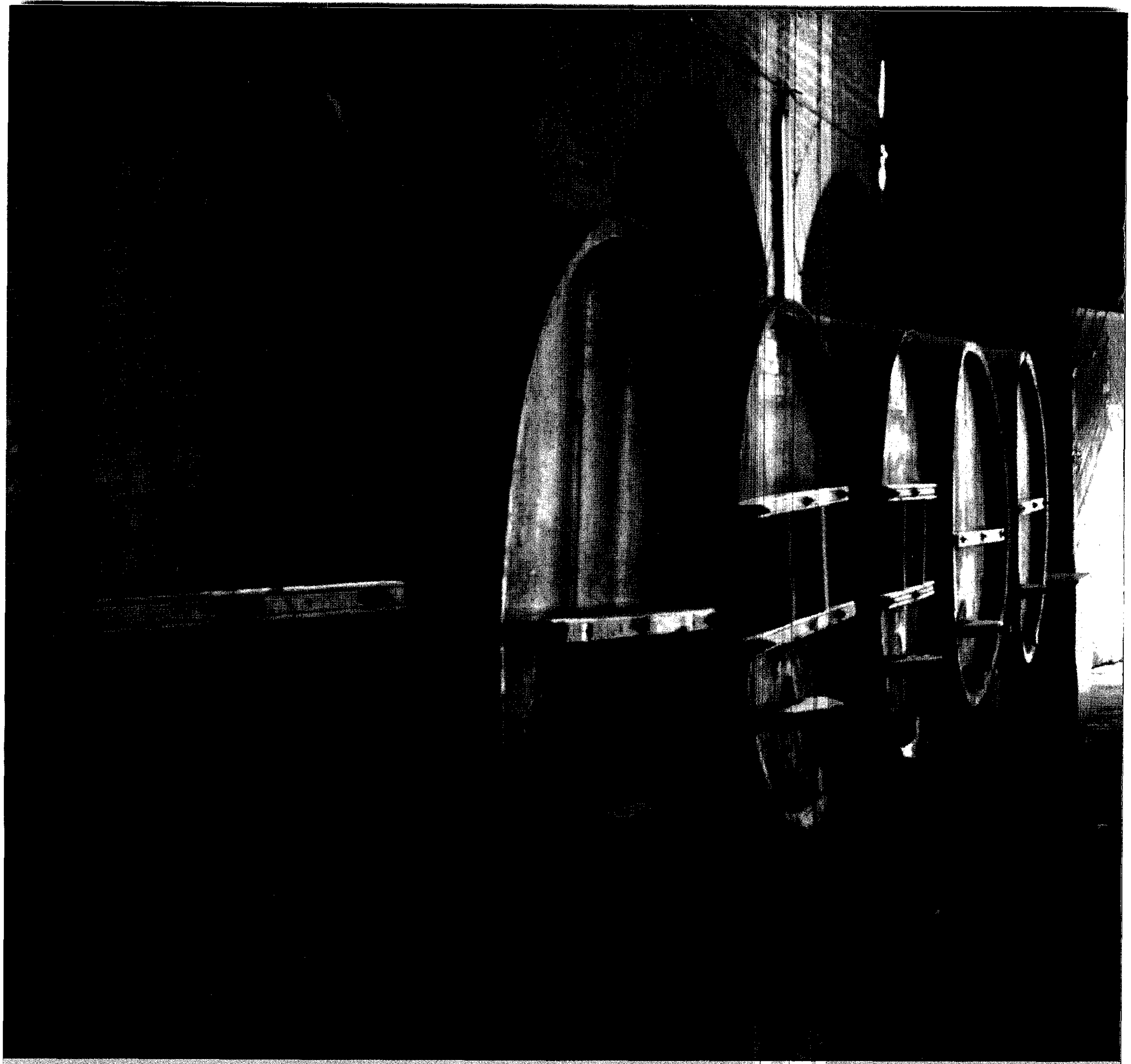

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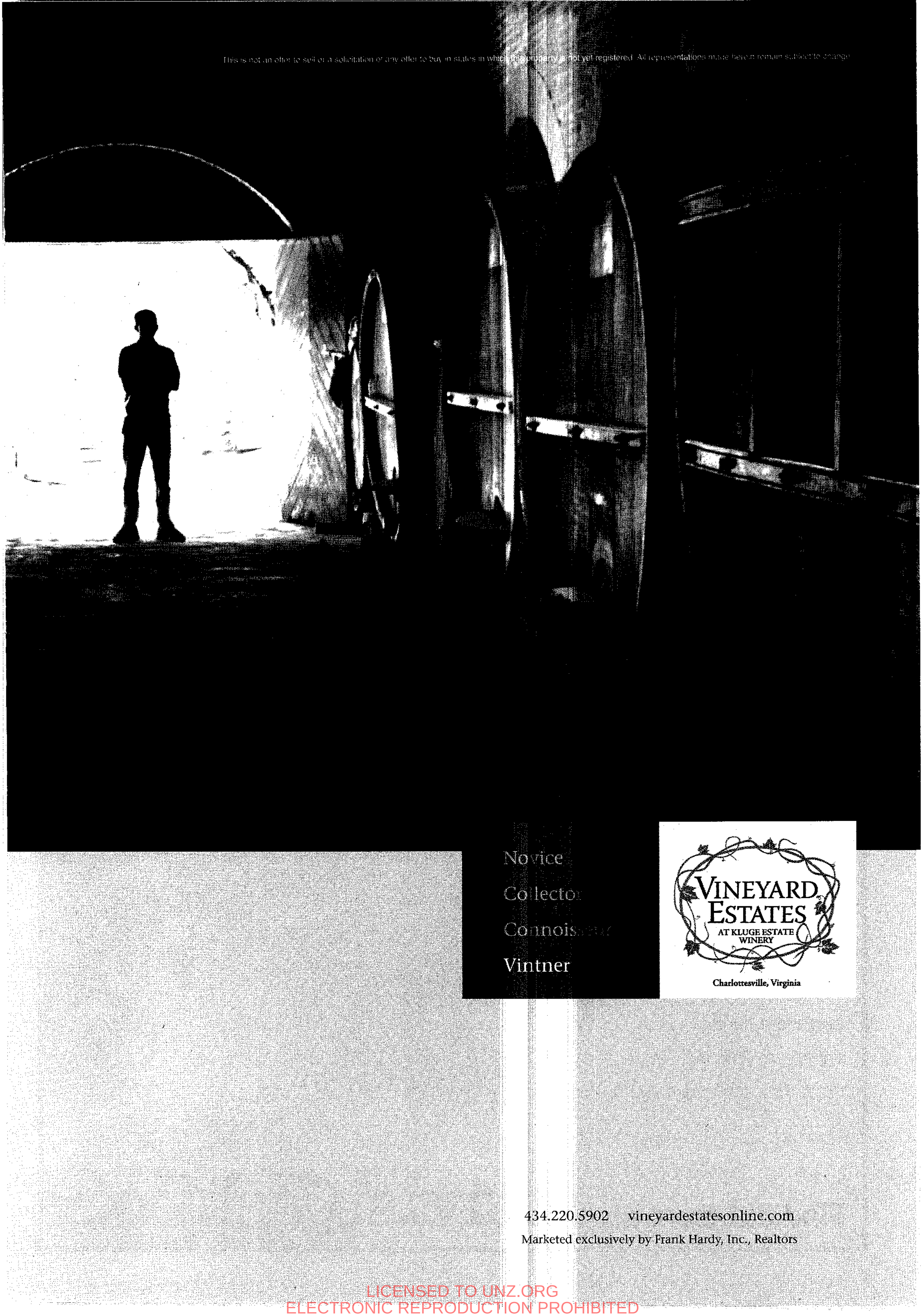
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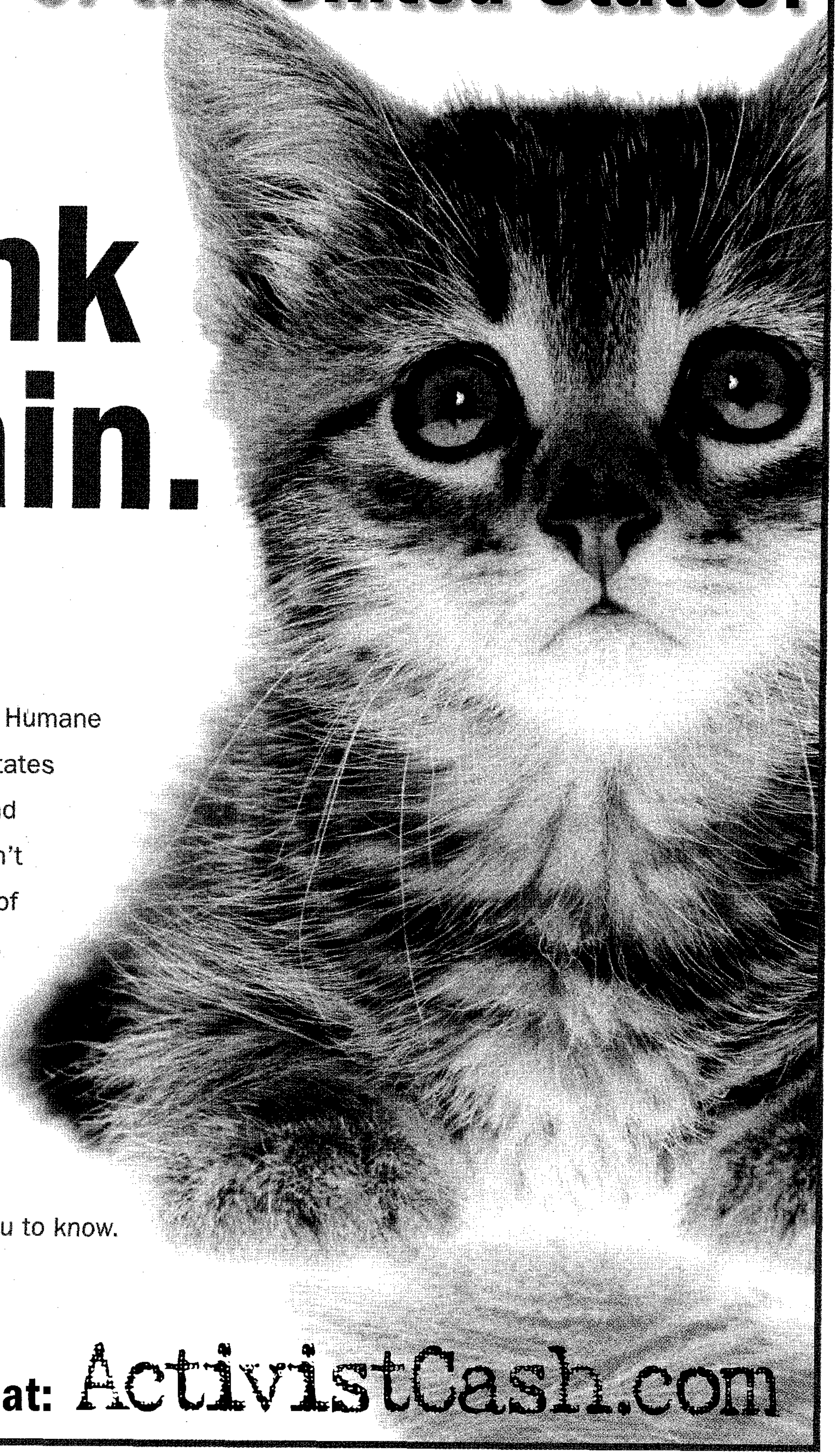

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west, in the early twentieth century, that New York became almost entirely dependent on imports; in recent years, thirty per cent of our fruits and vegetables have come all the way from California.

New York's abundance lingers on as rumor and memory, but the city's ground is intrinsically fertile, and I decided next to get a sense of the natural wealth of New York by eating things that are growing here by accident. "Why don't you try foraging Central Park with 'Wildman' Steve Brill?" Gabrielle suggested. Steve, she explained, could point to everything *sauvage* that there was to eat in the city. I was taken with the idea of using the Park as a kitchen garden, like those country friends who scamper into the yard for fresh-cut basil.

A Sunday or two later, I found myself, with my children, following Steve on one of his encyclopedic tours of New York's edible nature. The children had been ornery when I announced my local eating plan.

"I'll eat New York food," Olivia, my seven-year-old, said. "But pigeons I will not eat. Squirrels I will not eat."

"Squirrels make a very delicious dish, called Brunswick stew," I offered. "And pigeons are squab. You see them on the best menus."

"Anything city-colored, that looks like it could actually live in New York, is being thrown out," Luke, the twelve-year-old, said. "Gray things. Brown things. We don't eat anything that blends in with the sidewalk. It needs to stand out from its surroundings." The strictures seemed daunting but the possibilities fresh.

"Now, this is wood sorrel," Brill was saying, bending over a little patch of weeds at the edge of the path that led toward the Park entrance at West 107th Street. "These are completely delicious! They taste just like lemonade!"

Everyone knelt down to taste them. A few meditative moments, ready to spit it out. Then: "Hey, this is good! It does taste like lemonade."

Wildman Steve Brill looked pleased, but unsurprised. He has had the fortitude to eat out of the Park for decades. Mushrooms and black cherries, field garlic and sassafras—he can construct entire meals around things he finds growing ferally near West Seventy-second Street. He is known for his Smokey Bear hat, his baggy pants, his Borscht Belt jokes.

"It says, 'Someday you will die.'"

"This is lamb's-quarter," Steve was saying, clearing a path to what, to the unknowing eye, looked just like the desultory weeds where the softball ends up after the fat kid with glasses you've stowed in right field watches it go by. Lamb's-quarter turned out to be a matte-green plant with arrow-shaped leaves.

"But now you have to be careful," he went on. "You see this?" He picked through the underbrush and found, alongside the lamb's-quarter, another, equally agreeable-looking weed. He held it up. "This is white snakeroot," he explained. "White snakeroot is *completely* poisonous. In the early days of the country, cows would eat it and it would get into their milk, creating what's called milk sickness. A fatal disease. Who knows how this changed American history?" No hands went up. "Abraham Lincoln, that's how. Abraham Lincoln's mother died of milk sickness caused by this very root. So you have to be careful to distinguish between lamb's-quarter, which is good, and white snakeroot, which, if you eat it . . ." He paused and then played Chopin's Funeral March on an improvised kazoo made of his lips and his right hand.

The children looked dubiously at the plastic bags they carried, stuffed with purslane and wood sorrel and lamb's-quarter. New York kids, they had learned the logic of safe and shaky blocks, but the logic of poisonous plants alongside wholesome ones was outside their experience.

Wildman Steve Brill went on to show us an almost unbelievable variety of edibles in Central Park: those purslane leaves, the Asiatic dayflower ("tastes like string beans"), poor man's pepper ("tastes like radish"), sassafras ("tastes like root beer—you can actually make root beer out of it!"), field garlic, even a kind of "artist's mushroom," which you can't eat but makes a wonderful sketchbook if scratched on.

"We should ask him what pigeon tastes like," Olivia said. "He looks like a pigeon-eater."

"He'd probably say it tastes like chicken," Luke told her. "That's what they always say."

Finally, it was time for a lunch break, and Steve and his dutiful followers settled down on the rocks and the lawn near the 107th Street entrance to eat what they had gathered plus a few slices of healthy-looking whole-grain bread. Luke stood up. He pointed with the urgency of a shipwrecked sailor spotting a sail. Just visible at the edge of the Park was a sign reading "West Side Deli." The Deli in the Distance! While our wholesome fellow-scavengers were looking elsewhere, we sneaked out of the Park and returned to hide in a small copse, so that the kids could gorge on a turkey hero with mayonnaise and potato chips and Snapple drinks. Then they returned to the group, a smear of orange around the mouth the only sign of their impiety.

Localism is a movement made of pieties. The cult of seasonality was a taste that evolved into a politics; localism is essentially a politics attempting to create a taste. It is built on the conviction that the industrial economics of food growing and delivery are bad for us and bad for the planet, but it also has an implicit moralistic attitude that prefers small country patches over big urban deserts.

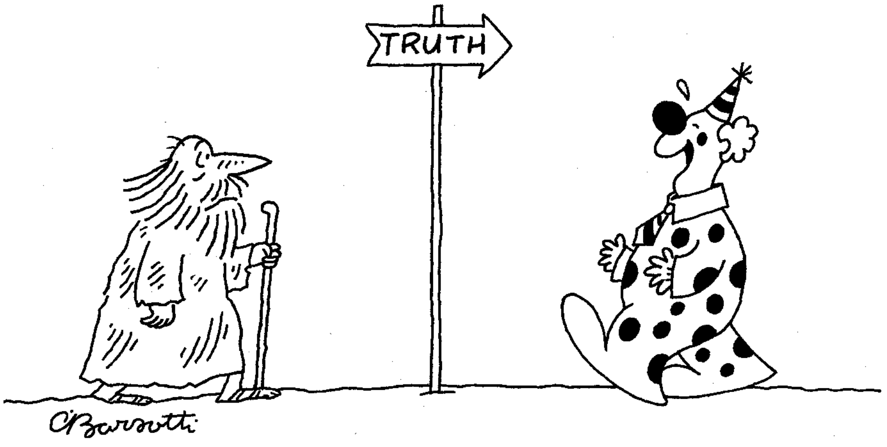
It is possible to have localism without nostalgia, though, and Gabrielle urged me to look into the tilapia-farming program at Brooklyn College. I took the subway out and met with Martin Schreibman, a biologist who has helped pioneer an ambitious project to create an enclosed system of fish farming, which could serve as a model for urban aquaculture in the future. If the ethic of the pure localists is in part reactionary, Schreibman's is scientific-minded, with Lex Luthor-like overtones: he dreams of giant translucent fish tanks surrounding our cities, where we would breed our own dinner in a ring of virtuous water.

"The demand for sustainable protein is *the* demand of this century," Schreibman told me. "Somehow we're going to have to produce enough protein to feed our population, and we'll have to do it in urban locales, because the costs of transportation are going to become prohibitive." He has spent most of his life at Brooklyn College, beginning as a student, in the fifties. He had been interested in problems of endocrinology and had started using fish as genetic models ("Rats are just terrible to work with," he said, a New Yorker's reaction), and then he had become as interested in the problems presented by raising fish as in doing the experiments the fish were being raised for.

"Tilapia is one of the easiest fish to raise," he explained. "It's an ancient, ancient fish—it's the fish eaten at the Last Supper. It's a warm-water fish, and it's not carnivorous, so you don't get the problems of input that you do with, say, salmon." As critics of the aquaculture industry never tire of pointing out, far more fish-mass has to go into feeding a farmed salmon than you get from the salmon itself. "The green revolution presented problems," he said. "Hey, we're still dealing with the *mishegoss* presented by the Industrial Revolution! That doesn't mean we should reverse the Industrial Revolution, since it was a solution to the problems of poverty that preceded it. Does the blue revolution present problems? You bet it does! Does that mean we should give up on it? Of course not." Schreibman has a vision, oft-repeated in his writings, of reviving the dying cities of New York state by making them centers of aquaculture, so that Rochester tilapia would be a "bonded" A.O.C. item, like Bresse chickens, but he has had a frustrating time getting the state government to adopt it.

"Meanwhile, we're getting flooded with Chinese aquaculture, and we have no idea what the fish are fed or what conditions they're raised in," he said. "This"—he made a gesture taking in the farmed fish—"is going to happen, and it's going to happen quickly. The question is if it's going to happen here, and happen in a way that we can oversee and control."

Schreibman showed me around the Brooklyn College fish farm, which feels, well, very *basement:* high windows and humid air and the whiz-kid sense of somebody's science-fair project percolating downstairs, below the kitchen. There is a Rube Goldbergish series of barrels and pipes, which bring the water into the fish tanks and cycle it back out again into shallow basins, where it gets used to grow plants, which can, in turn, be used to feed the fish—or us. There are even some related projects, where "ornamental" fish, seahorses and clownfish, are being raised. The tilapia swim in dense, dim schools within their barrels—oddly ominous shapes in the green water, the future in fish. Schreibman gave me a few fillets for the urban table.



As time went on, we had Greenmarket herbs growing on our windowsill; knew we could forage in the Park, and so had a source for homemade root beer; were pulling plenty of local honey; owned some tilapia. But we wanted produce from a real farm, too. So, on the Fourth of July, Gabrielle and I and the children went out to the two working farms that we had found within the city limits: Decker Farm, in Staten Island, and the Red Hook Community Farm, in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Decker, fifteen minutes across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, is a small place, smelling of damp earth, that is farmed by a handful of Mexican émigrés who work in a pizza parlor nearby. The Mexicans discovered, upon arriving in Staten Island, that they missed farming—missed Mexican things like jalapeños and tomatillos and fresh cilantro. They work their plots on days off, nights, and weekends, and they loaded us down with poblanos and hot and sweet peppers. (The only farm-grown food used at the pizza place is basil.)

The Red Hook Community Farm, just around the corner from the new Fairway, is more socially ambitious. It is an urban farm reclaimed from an old asphalt playground, with soil piled high. It looks like a Bruce McCall drawing of a pastoralized New York, the asphalt playground with a farm just dropped on top, and a twenty-foot-tall chain-link fence running around it. Begun as a kind of reclamation project for young people, it has become a three-acre farm that supplies many of the local epicurean joints with arugula and collard greens. "Twenty teen-agers work here each week for a ten-week session," Ian Marvy, the farm's director, said. "We sell to the community, and we also sell, at a good profit, to the restaurants that have come to Red Hook in the past few years.

Farming in Brooklyn reconnects kids to the earth. We bring schoolkids here from all over the city for a day's program. Most of them have no idea that vegetables come out of the ground."

Ian went on, "We try to run the farm organically. Our compost is composed almost entirely of manure from the Bronx Zoo. We use the manure of herbivores, like zebras and elephants."

I looked at him for a moment, wondering if this was an urban-farm poker-faced joke, but he assured me that it wasn't. I asked if we could taste the elephant manure residually in the food.

"Yes, you can," he said. "I mean, we have a dark chlorophyll flavor in all of our vegetables, and I really think that you can taste the concentration of nitrogen. It's a New York taste." I looked at the turnips with new respect. Along with turnips, we collected super-spicy arugula, squash, and green beans, and drove back home.

With the Red Hook and Decker Farm vegetables on hand, I decided to make Saturday dinner the centerpiece of our local-eating moment, featuring one blow-out meal of good things from around the boroughs. But I was more determined than ever to collect that chicken, and, with my restaurateur friend Peter Hoffman, the owner of Savoy and of a new place called Back Forty, and a devotee of localism and seasonalism both, drove up to the Bronx to get it. We pulled up at the meeting spot I had chosen with Freddie, near the coop, and there he was.

"So, you got the chicken?" I said, looking up at the sky in my sunglasses.

"Yeah, I got the chicken. This one." He pointed down at one of his handsome whites. The chickens pecked and clucked.

"Oh," I said. "Well, I was hoping you would, you know, make it ready for us to eat."

For the first time, Freddie turned toward me. "You want me to kill it?" he said. "I don't—I can't kill my chickens! I raise 'em. I love 'em. I thought you wanted it—you said you wanted a chicken." We looked at each other head on. "It's, like, all bloody and all, I don't like to do that," he said, with apology and annoyance mixed. Then a little anger crept in. "I thought you wanted a chicken. To raise! Not to kill!"

I withdrew with what dignity I could, and left, expelled from the Garden of Happiness. Peter and I drove over to Arthur Avenue, where venders make their own ricotta, and sausage hangs from the ceiling, and started to head home.

Just then, bombing down Third Avenue in the Bronx, we caught sight of the biggest, gaudiest, most alluring slaughterhouse either of us had ever seen. Musa's, it was called, with a broad, wooden front painted rather in the manner of Haitian folk art. Lambs and goats gazed through wooden slats onto the sidewalk, where local children fed and petted them. A giant hand-painted "Lookee! Lookee!" sign pointed to the young animals, and a frieze of paintings above suggested all the kinds of animal you could have killed for your dinner.

We went inside. It wasn't just a slaughterhouse but more like a pagan temple: the small animals awaiting sacrifice, calves and kids and lambs. We picked out a chicken from a coop crowded with whites and browns and reds. It was white-feathered, and protested briefly with a squawk as it was selected, weighed, and disappeared into the back room. The smells of a slaughterhouse—not horrible, really, just deep, a farm smell in the city—filled the air. A few minutes later, a bag came out, with the chicken, still warm, cut up inside. It wasn't, of course, precisely the New York chicken that I had hoped for. It was an upstate chicken, most likely, that had come to town just for the hell of it, but its life cycle—born elsewhere, arrived in hope, lived in cramped quarters, ended its New York existence violently and unexpectedly at the hands of someone with a fatal amount of money—seemed to make its life local enough to qualify. I took it home to cook.

There are powerful arguments against localism: apart from the inevitable statistical tussles about exactly how much fuel is used for how much food, the one word that never occurs in the evocation of the lost world of small cities and nearby farms is "famine." Our peasant ancestors, who lived locally and ate seasonally from the fruit of their own vines and the meat of their own lambs, were hungry all the time. The localist vision of the tiny polis and its surrounding gardens has historically led to bitter conflict, not Arcadian harmony.

It is even perilously easy to construct a Veblenian explanation for the vogue for localism. Where a century ago all upwardly mobile people knew enough, and had enough resources, to get their hands on the most unseasonable foods from the most distant places, in order to distinguish themselves from the peasant past and the laboring masses, their descendants now distinguish themselves by hustling after a peasant diet.

This may be so; but the fact that one can explain everything in social life as a series of status exchanges does not mean that social life is *only* a series of status exchanges. It was cool to be a liberal in 1963, but that did not make liberal attitudes to race foolish. All human values get expressed as social rituals; we place bets on which of the rituals are worth serving.

So I made our local dinner. Gabrielle, her boyfriend, Craig Haney, the Hoffmans, and our family gathered around the table. We had Bronx chicken with Staten Island peppers, sweet and hot, and rooftop basil; tilapia *tajine;* a big pot of green beans; turnip purée, redolent of elephant; super-spicy Brooklyn arugula salad. Aside from the spices and the olive oil—which we allowed ourselves under what is called a "Marco Polo exemption," common to localism—everything in the dinner hailed from, or had at least seen its first or last days, within the city limits of New York. It was M.T.A. localism—short-term localism, a quick sprint, rather than the more dutiful long haul. But it could be done.

If there was something to be learned, it's that the question of locality is one that can be either narrow and parched or broad and humanizing. As usual, the frivolous reason is the better reason, and the better reason looks a bit frivolous. To shorten the food chain is to pull it close, close enough to put a face on one's food and a familiar place on one's plate. To eat something local is to meet someone nearby. We had put the city, from Brooklyn ingenuity and Bronx Zoo manure to a slaughterhouse on 168th Street, on a plate, and eaten it up. The plates had stories, where they normally have only food.

The one thing that puzzled me was why Olivia, normally a major fresser, hadn't eaten any of the chicken dish; it was a touch tough but, still, tasty. She had, instead of eating, done some very professional food pushing around the plate. (Seven-year-olds know that you won't get busted for food-pushing-on-the-plate, only for food-rejecting.) "I did try it," she told me at last, the next day. "The problem was, it tasted just like pigeon." ♦

FAMILY DINNER

SIXTY-NINE CENTS

ANTHONY RUSSO

When I was fourteen years old, I lost my Russian accent. I could, in theory, walk up to a girl and the words “Oh, hi there” would not sound like Okht Hyzer, possibly the name of a Turkish politician. There were three things I wanted to do in my new incarnation: go to Florida, where I understood that our nation’s best and brightest had built themselves a sandy, vice-filled paradise; have a girl, preferably native-born, tell me that she liked me in some way; and eat all my meals at McDonald’s. I did not have the pleasure of eating at McDonald’s often. My parents believed that going to restaurants and buying clothes not sold by weight on Orchard Street were things done only by the very wealthy or the very profligate, maybe those extravagant “welfare queens” we kept hearing about on television. Even my parents, however, as uncritically in love with America as only immigrants can be, could not resist the iconic pull of Florida, the call of the beach and the Mouse.

And so, in the midst of my Hebrew-school winter vacation, two Russian families crammed into a large used sedan and took I-95 down to the Sunshine State. The other family—three members in all—mirrored our own, except that their single offspring was a girl and they were, on the whole, more ample; by contrast, my entire family weighed three hundred pounds. There’s a picture of us beneath the monorail at EPCOT Center, each of us trying out a different smile to express the déjà-vu feeling of standing squarely in our new country’s greatest attraction, my own megawatt grin that of a turn-of-the-century Jewish peddler scampering after a potential sidewalk sale. The Disney tickets were a freebie, for which we had had to sit through a sales pitch for an Orlando time-share. “You’re from Moscow?” the time-share salesman asked, appraising the polyester cut of my father’s jib.

“Leningrad.”

“Let me guess: mechanical engineer?”

“Yes, mechanical engineer. . . . Eh, please Disney tickets now.”

The ride over the MacArthur Causeway to Miami Beach was my real naturalization ceremony. I wanted all of it—the palm trees, the yachts bobbing beside the hard-currency mansions, the concrete-and-glass condominiums preening at their own reflections in the azure pool water below, the implicit availability of relations with amoral women. I could see myself on a balcony eating a Big Mac, casually throwing fries over my shoulder into the sea-salted air. But I would have to wait. The hotel reserved by my parents’ friends featured army cots instead of beds and a half-foot-long cockroach evolved enough to wave what looked like a fist at us. Scared out of Miami Beach, we decamped for Fort Lauderdale, where a Yugoslav woman sheltered us in a faded motel, beach-adjacent and featuring free UHF reception. We always seemed to be at the margins of places: the driveway of the Fontainebleau Hilton, or the glassed-in elevator leading to a rooftop restaurant where we could momentarily peek over the “Please Wait to Be Seated” sign at the endless ocean below, the Old World we had left behind so far and yet deceptively near.

To my parents and their friends, the Yugoslav motel was an unquestioned paradise, a lucky coda to a set of difficult lives. My father lay magnificently beneath the sun in his red-and-black striped imitation Speedo while I stalked down the beach, past baking Midwestern girls. “Oh, hi there.” The words, perfectly American, not a birthright but an acquisition, perched between my lips, but to walk up to one of those girls and say something so casual required a deep rootedness to the hot sand beneath me, a historical presence thicker than the green card embossed with my thumbprint and freckled face. Back at the motel, the “Star Trek” reruns looped endlessly on Channel 73 or 31 or some other prime number, the washed-out Technicolor planets more familiar to me than our own.

On the drive back to New York, I plugged myself firmly into my Walkman, hoping to forget our vacation. Sometime after the palm trees ran out, somewhere in southern Georgia, we stopped at a McDonald’s. I could already taste it: The sixty-nine-cent hamburger. The ketchup, red and decadent, embedded with little flecks of grated onion. The uplift of the pickle slices; the obliterating rush of fresh Coca-Cola; the soda tingle at the back of the throat signifying that the act was complete. I ran into the meat-fumigated coldness of the magical place, the larger Russians following behind me, lugging something big and red. It was a cooler, packed, before we left the motel, by the other mother, the kindly, round-faced equivalent of my own mother. She had prepared a full Russian lunch for us. Soft-boiled eggs wrapped in tinfoil; *vinigret*, the Russian beet salad, overflowing a reused container of sour cream; cold chicken served between crisp white furrows of a *bulka*. “But it’s not allowed,” I pleaded. “We have to buy the food here.”

I felt coldness, not the air-conditioned chill of southern Georgia but the coldness of a body understanding the ramifications of its own demise, the pointlessness of it all. I sat down at a table as far away from my parents and their friends as possible. I watched the spectacle of the newly tanned resident aliens eating their ethnic meal—jowls working, jowls working—the soft-boiled eggs that quivered lightly as they were brought to the mouth; the girl, my coeval, sullen like me but with a hint of pliant equanimity; her parents, dishing out the chunks of beet with plastic spoons; my parents, getting up to use free McDonald’s napkins and straws while American motorists with their noisy towheaded children bought themselves the happiest of meals.

My parents laughed at my haughtiness. Sitting there hungry and all alone—what a strange man I was becoming! So unlike them. My pockets were filled with several quarters and dimes, enough for a hamburger and a small Coke. I considered the possibility of redeeming my own dignity, of leaving behind our beet-salad heritage. My parents didn’t spend money, because they lived with the idea that disaster was close at hand, that a liver-function test would come back marked with a doctor’s urgent scrawl, that they would be fired from their jobs because their English did not suffice. We were all representatives of a shadow society, cowering under a cloud of bad tidings that would never come. The silver coins stayed in my pocket, the anger burrowed and expanded into some future ulcer. I was my parents’ son.

—*Gary Shteyngart*

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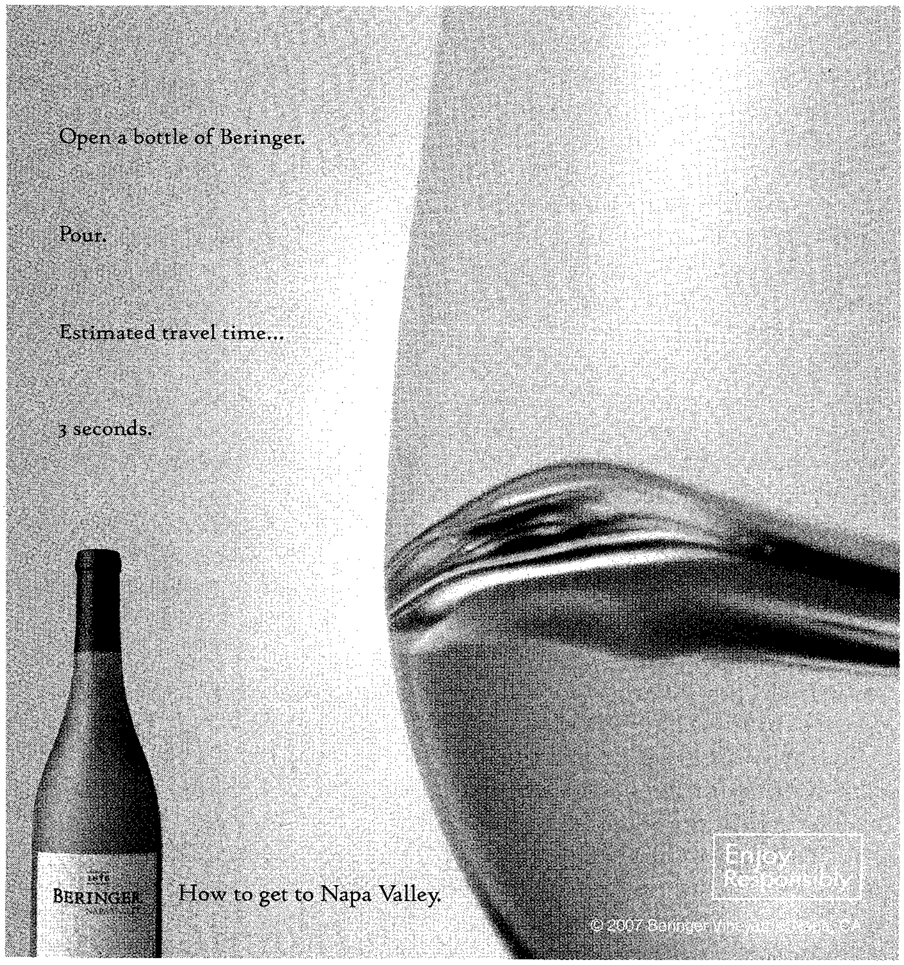

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OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE FAST LANE

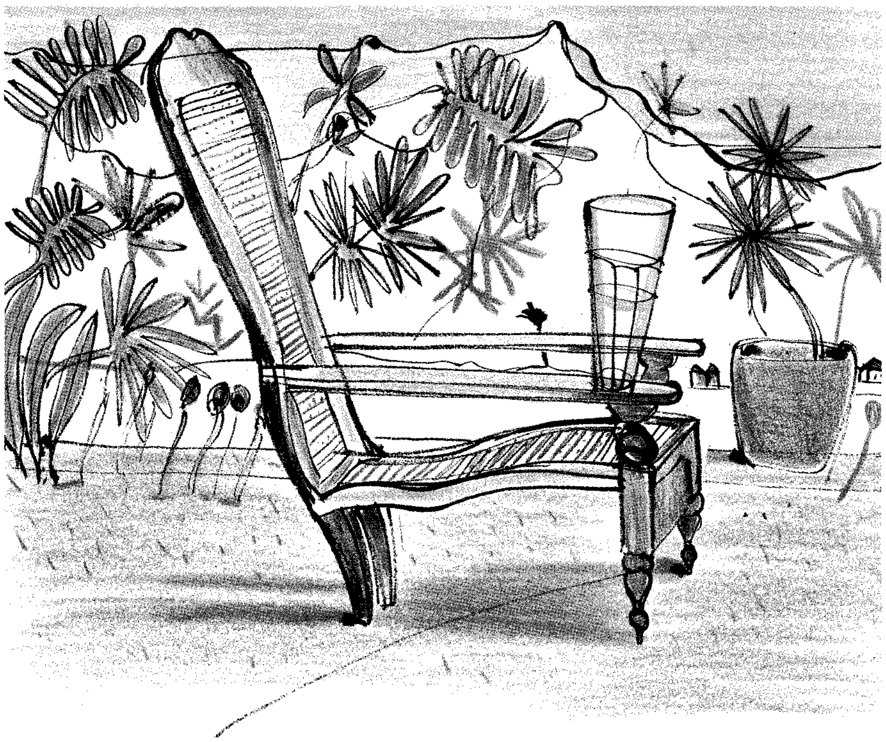
You are what you don't eat.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

Caesar's doctor, it is said, once gave him some good diet advice: "Rise from the table half full." What would the world be like if, knowing what was good for us, we did it, and, knowing what was bad for us, we resisted? Eve might have asked the same question after breaking the fast of her innocence.

Atonement takes as many forms as wishful thinking, and last February I signed up for a three-day retreat at We Care, a holistic fasting spa in Desert Hot Springs, California, that is popular with celebrities. For a week before it began, I had followed the spa's instructions to prime my body and will power by abstaining from coffee, alcohol, sugar, fats, meat, dairy products, and medications. I was fairly confident that my resolve could hold out (the noun "fast" and the adjective have the same etymological root, in the concept of firmness), but not everyone blows off the serpent. "I won't mention names," the minivan driver told me on our way to the spa from the airport, "but certain clients have called my husband at midnight, begging him to pick up a pack of cigarettes, or some take-out, and meet them in the parking lot."

We Care is a cluster of adobe buildings on a five-acre tract of the Mojave Desert that can accommodate about twenty guests. The owners profess to be devout environmentalists, so I was puzzled by the lushness of the garden and the lawns, which ordinarily need lots of water. Just beyond the grounds lies an austere landscape of pale, cactus-studded sand rimmed like a piecrust by majestic peaks that change color—from pale rose to dark blue—in the pure air. This picturesque isolation, marred only slightly by the carcasses of old cars, and by the debris from obscure revels tangled in the sagebrush, is part of the spa's mystique. Fasters are essentially sequestered, as in a cloister or a boot camp, several miles from the temptations (bars, restaurants, and delis) of the town. You can't smell any cooking, and employees eat out of sight. A high fence shields the compound from the road, and an unmanned police car is parked permanently behind the front gate, apparently to discourage trespassers, or teen-age boys hoping to catch a glimpse of Gisele Bündchen, though it makes a somewhat penal first impression. No one checks your luggage for contraband, but, once you register, you forswear solid nourishment until the day you leave, when each guest receives the parting gift of a small salad in a plastic container. (The salads sit in a glass refrigerator under the tea bar, and after a while they begin to look as mouthwatering as tarts in the window of a French bakery.)



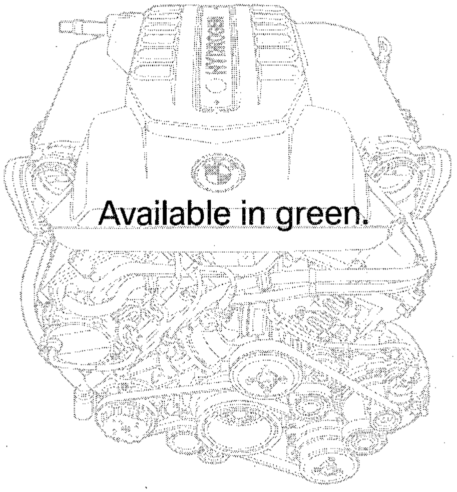
A fast has "walls" the way a run does: if the body balks, the mind has to push it across.

FILIPE JARDIM

A three-day fast is wimpy by We Care standards. The average stay is a week or two—long enough, the spa's literature claims, for the body to surrender its toxins. Blood glucose is burned up first, within twenty-four hours; then glycogen in the liver gets melted down; and, after about two days, your system starts raiding its muscle tissue. (When a third to a half of those stores have been depleted, death usually ensues.) Blubber, in the meanwhile, is supplying about eighty-five per cent of the calories needed for basal metabolic functions, so the more you have, the longer you can last. Some clients tough it out for a month, but all fasters—fat or lean, old or young, fit or decrepit—subsist on the same daily regimen: unlimited lemon water and herbal teas, which are said to cleanse the liver and the kidneys; an array of dietary supplements to be taken in a precise order, at specified times; a glass of fresh green-vegetable juice; a powdered fibre drink that you have to dilute properly or it congeals in your stomach like cement; and, between four and ten in the evening, a cup of thin vegetable purée. I made a discovery, however, while I was hovering outside the kitchen door at 3:55 P.M., waiting for the soup: you can, if you panic, cadge a smoothie. But the staff doesn't like to broadcast the fact, I was told by a fellow-witness to one of the clandestine handovers, because "it sets a bad example."

Guests checking into We Care fill out a health questionnaire, sign a release, and receive instructions for breaking their fast prudently at its term. There are no medical personnel in residence, nor does the management accept responsibility for problems that may arise. Few are likely, though, if you don't make a beeline for the nearest Chinese restaurant the night you are liberated. (Bingers may wind up in the emergency room, since a blast of food, like an electric surge, can overload a system in rest mode.) With adequate hydration, a normally upholstered adult can live without calories for about two months. A fast has "walls" the way a run does, and beginners mistake them for limits, when in fact they are thresholds of refusal: if the body balks, the mind has to push it across. In 1930, a few years after Kafka published "A Hunger Artist," Shipwreck Kelly, the famous flagpole-sitter, ate nothing solid for forty-nine days atop a perch in Atlantic City, cheered on by a large crowd, and the emaciated Gandhi endured (though barely) three twenty-one-day hunger strikes.

Individuals who defy their survival instincts—hunger, pain, fatigue, desire, the fear of death—in the service of a higher power (or for the record books) acquire prestige in most societies. Every major religion endorses abstinence from food on special occasions, with the exception of Sikhism. Hindus may fast weekly, monthly, or during festivals. Muslims fast from dawn to sunset throughout the month of Ramadan. Observant Jews neither eat nor drink for twenty-five hours twice a year—on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and on Tishah-b'Ab, a solemn holy day that commemorates the destruction of the first and second temples. Although drastic asceticism runs counter to the Buddha's teachings on moderation (he achieved his Great Awakening only after he accepted a bowl of gruel from a shepherdess, ending a long period of self-starvation that had left him too weak to meditate), many monastic communities follow his example of limiting daily nourishment to one late-morning meal. There are seventy-one references to fasting in the Bible, the most famous describing Christ's forty days in the desert. Elijah also fasted for forty days, and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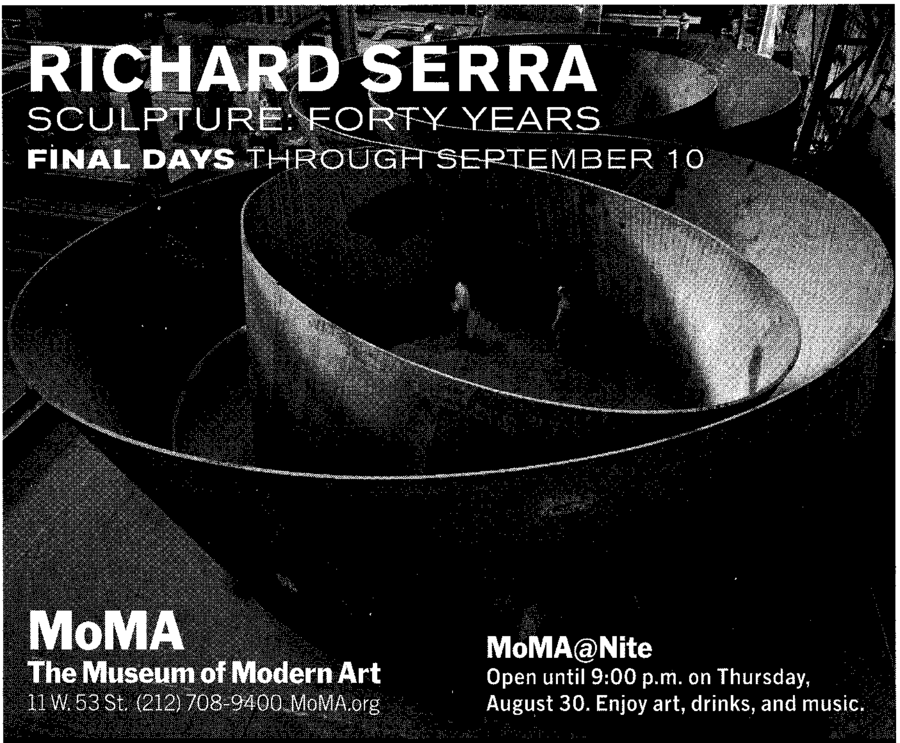

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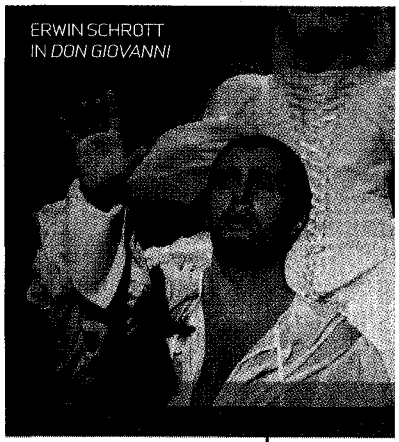

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so did Moses—on two occasions. Queen Esther and her handmaidens fasted for three days, and King David for a week. Ahab fasted in a sulk, and Job got too depressed to eat, but who can blame him?

Trials of purity often entail fasting, though the vivid dreams or visions and euphoria recorded in their lore may not be supernaturally inspired. Three or four days into a total fast, the liver starts to convert fatty acids into fuel. This stage is called ketosis, and among its by-products are a buildup of acetoacetate, which is believed to produce mild intoxication, and a release of beta endorphins, which are linked to satiety. Ketosis may explain an experience common to fasters and anorexics: the disappearance of hunger, accompanied by rushes of elation. It also affects marathoners who exhaust their blood glucose. A starving organism, in other words, drugs itself. That may account for the almost mystical sensation of passing through, rather than scaling, the walls of a run or a fast. You have the illusion of being disembodied.

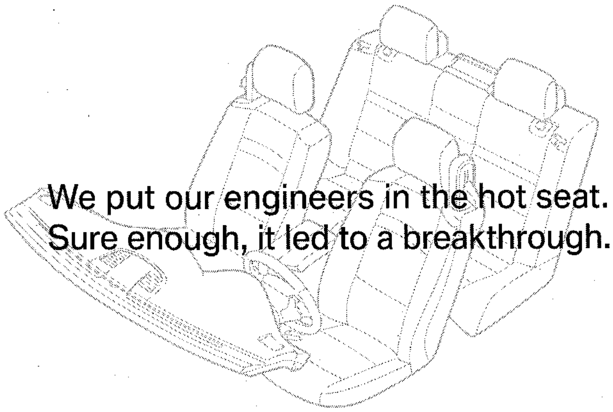
We Care's Web site promises an "ultra-lavish" experience, and prices are commensurate with the boast. (One can expect to lose about a pound a day, or a size a week, and to emerge about four thousand dollars lighter, with an improved complexion.) The spa treatments are superior, though outside the cabanas where guests are splashed and rubbed by expert hands you are neither coddled nor supervised. You are supposed to keep track of your tea mug—inscribed with your name in Magic Marker—and to mix or brew your own potions. The older rooms, off the courtyard, are dark and a bit tired, and the lounge has a collegiate atmosphere, heightened by the fraternity among heterogeneous strangers with a common purpose. But fasting, like pot, makes some people gregarious and others aloof. Ghostly figures, lost in reverie, wander through the garden in white robes, as they would in an ashram.

The center was founded twenty-one years ago by Susana Lombardi, an immigrant from Argentina who had no training in health care or nutrition. She was a single mother, overweight and carnivorous, who had turned her life around after a bad divorce, a bout of depression, money woes, and a cancer scare, by following a program of holistic healing and chiropraxis. With the zeal of a convert, she set out to share the secrets of her newfound well-being with other benighted sufferers in need of detox, as she saw it, from the poisons that accumulate during a stressed life of unmindfulness. Weight loss is the inevitable consequence of not eating, but it isn't, at least in principle, We Care's raison d'être. A number of the fasters on my rotation, both men and women, would, like me, probably be considered skinny. (When I announced my travel plans to my companion, he looked up from his English breakfast and, pausing to light a cigarette, suggested that I'd be "better off going someplace where they force-feed you milkshakes.") "At these rates," a woman from Los Angeles told me, "I could probably hole up at the Four Seasons, and block calls to room service. But the draw of We Care isn't really the amenities—it's the alternative reality."

Lombardi's daughter Susy, a former model who "burned out on the fashion industry," joined the management in the early nineties, upgrading some of the rooms, which have an East-meets-Southwest décor, and introducing a line of beauty creams. Old hands whom I met were nostalgic for the camaraderie and Spartan idealism that they say prevailed in the less profit-driven days. They still return, though, and some guests, like a wealthy Middle Eastern couple, a Miami real-estate mogul, and an East Coast publishing executive, travel long distances for the cure. Many spas and some hospitals offer fasting programs, but few are as hard-core as We Care, which claims that eighty per cent of the clientele returns, and in high season—October through July—there is sometimes a waiting list.

Readjusting my inner clock to the slowness of an idle day unpunctuated by meals, a newspaper, shopping, coffee breaks, or a glass of wine was, for me, one of the fast's greatest hurdles. Like invalids at a sanatorium, we were kept busy charting our intake of capsules and fluids, but my hunger pangs were easier to manage than my hunger for distraction. I scheduled as many treatments as I have body parts, took a yoga class, and went for long walks in the desert. On my second evening, I listened to Starla Dean, a "transformational consultant" and "core radiance breathwork practitioner," beat her shaman's tomtom in the lounge. The next morning, I rocked myself in a king-size hammock; jumped on the trampoline until I got dizzy; swam a lap in the dinky pool; and threaded the pebble labyrinth. (All that took an hour.) At the center of the labyrinth is a statue of the Virgin Mary, and you can write a good intention on a scrap of paper and leave it with her, to be burned in a monthly rite. The art at We Care is ecumenical—tribal masks on the walls, Buddhas in the garden, and "The Temple of Gravity," a piece of outdoor sculpture by Zachary Coffin, which has been described as "a modern-day Stonehenge." This marvel or eyesore, depending on your taste, is a steel dome, open to the sky, three stories high and fifty feet in diameter. Five slabs of granite, shaped like wedges of Cheddar, weighing seventeen thousand pounds each, are suspended by flimsy-looking cables at acute angles. They are said to radiate magnetic energy, but, if so, I didn't stand under them long enough to absorb any. The San Andreas Fault runs directly under the spa.

Los Angeles is only about a hundred miles west of Desert Hot Springs, and, with Oscar night approaching, a number of guests had checked into We Care for a red-carpet tuneup. I didn't recognize any nominees, though the actress Barbara Rush—a svelte eighty-year-old teetotaller, who visits the spa twice a year and goes for a seven-mile walk every morning—was just finishing her retreat. Her vigor and radiance were objects of much admiration. Another fasting buff, a New Yorker in the travel business, later noted to me, "We Care is a stop on the Hollywood rehab circuit. You get rock stars, actors, supermodels, and Brentwood divorcées back on the market. You also get cancer patients looking for a miracle." Fasting has always been related to a quest for miracles—divine blessings or forgiveness—but particularly the miracle of regeneration. As he put it, "When you work too hard, you party too hard, and it's a vicious



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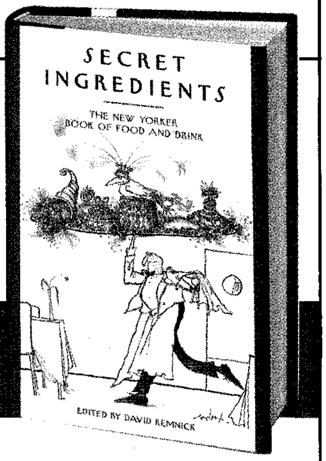
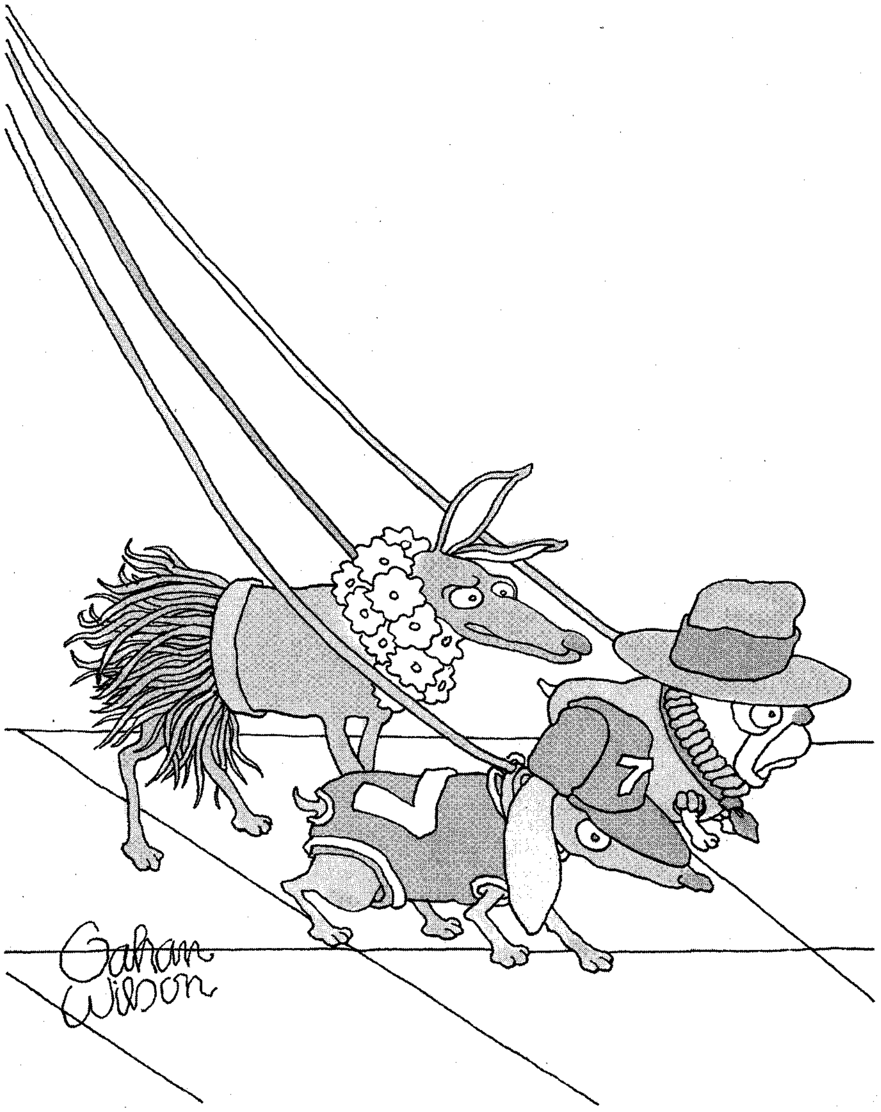


circle. But, if you don't eat for a week and do the colonics, you're going to be a new person."

Colonic hydrotherapy, also known as a high colonic, or colonic cleansing, is, essentially, a giant enema. This controversial procedure plays a central role—one could almost call it a sacrament—in the We Care regimen. Susana Lombardi herself is a certified colonic therapist, and on every bedside table is a best-seller by Kevin Trudeau, "Natural Cures 'They' Don't Want You to Know About," which aggressively touts colonics for weight loss (fifteen of them a month), along with Dianetics, a variety of unapproved supplements, live-cell injections, tanning without sunscreen, naturopathic remedies for cancer and mental illness, reducing stress by ignoring the news, and an us/them world view. The director of We Care, Donna Sullivan, told me that Lombardi "has a personal and professional relationship" with Trudeau, though it isn't clear whether she has ignored the news that he is a convicted felon who has served jail time for credit-card fraud and has paid multimillion-dollar fines for wildly misleading infomercials that hawked his panaceas, and are now banned from television.

The benefits of colonic hydrotherapy have been neither proved nor discredited scientifically. The American College of Gastroenterology takes no position on the subject, but the Mayo Clinic calls the treatment "unnecessary" and possibly "harmful." (Cases of infection from improperly sterilized equipment, and of weakened sphincter muscles, have been documented.) Whatever the risks, however, enemas have been used ritually and



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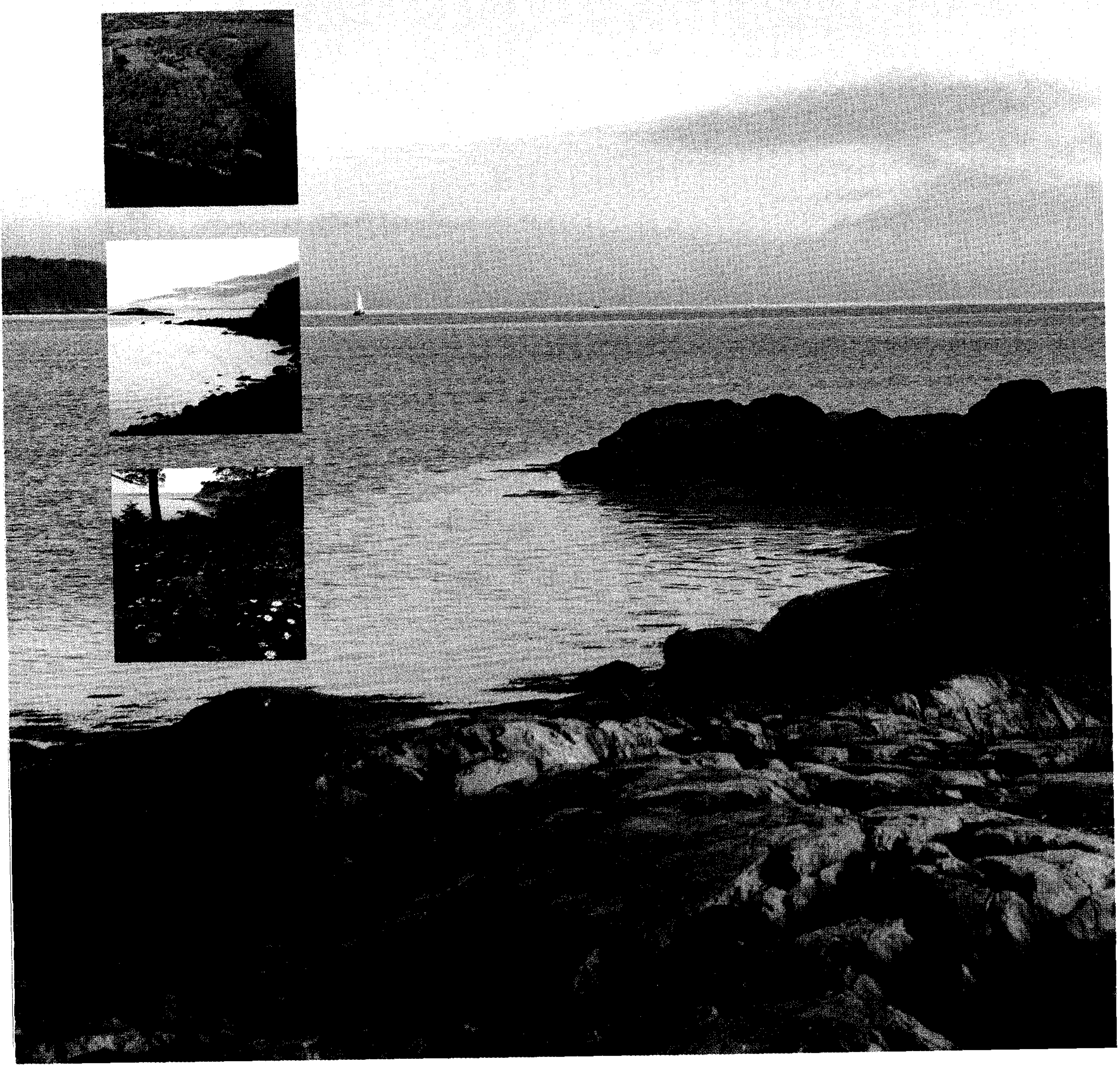

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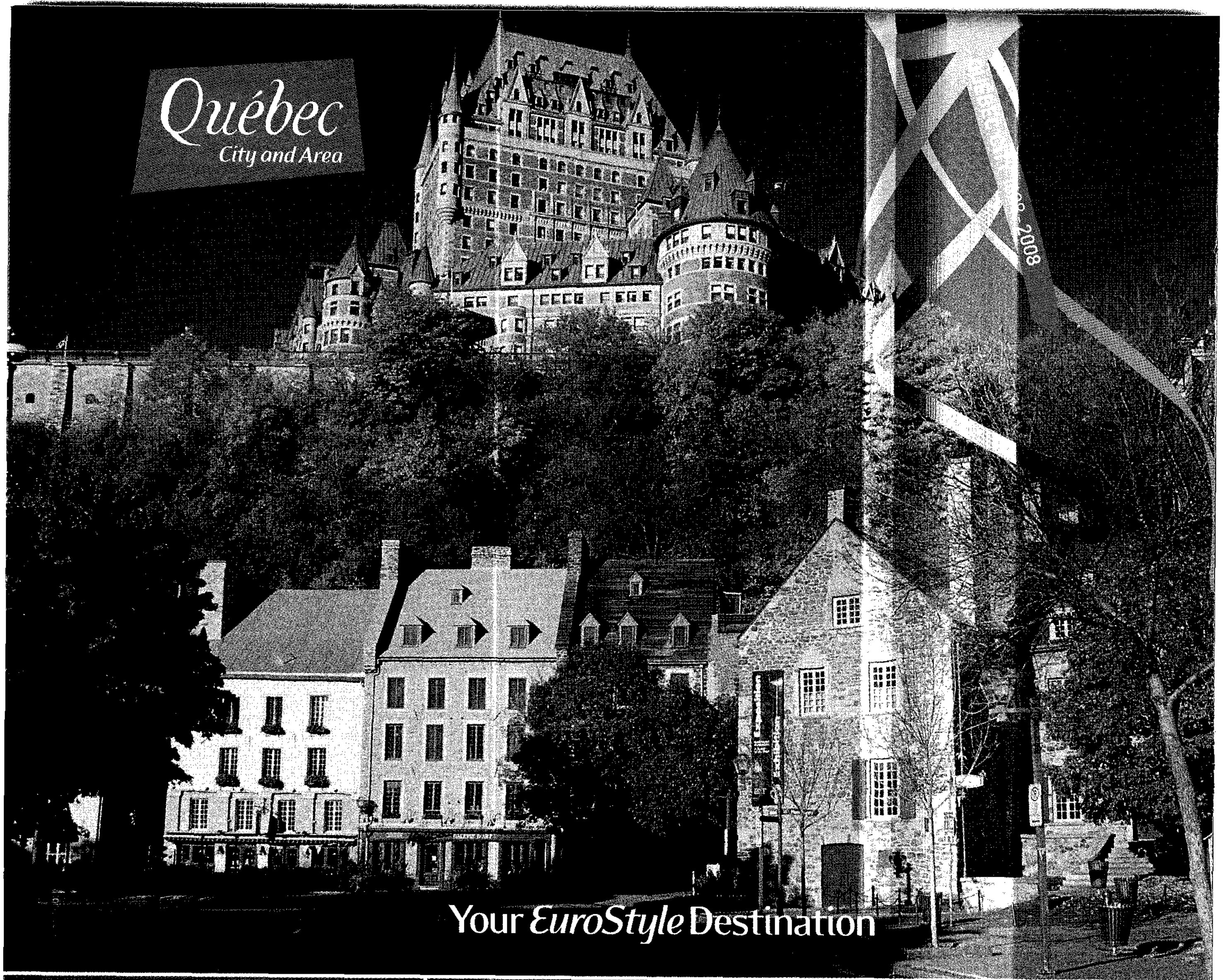

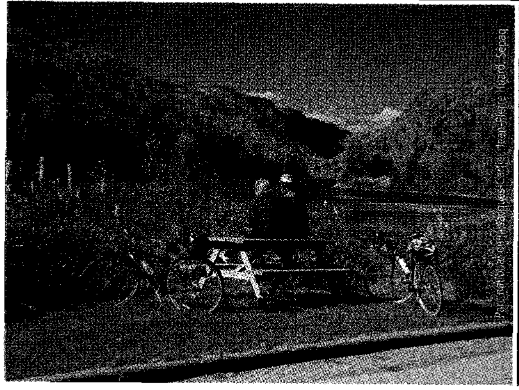

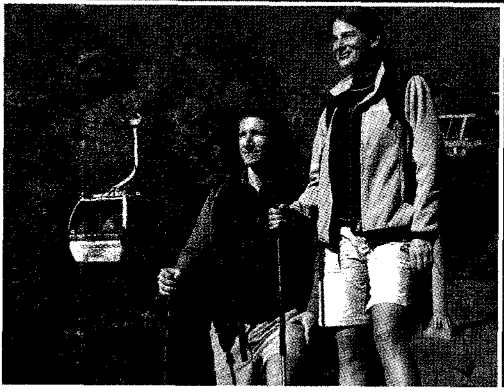

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medically since ancient times—by the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Essenes, Mayan priests (who diluted them with hallucinogens), and in medieval Spain, where the procedure was known as "playing the bagpipes." The late Princess of Wales was not the only royal enthusiast. In 1480, a timely enema saved Louis XI, or so he believed, from an attack of apoplexy, making him an ardent advocate, and the world's first doting dog-lover to douche his pets. By the seventeenth century—the enema's "golden age"—primitive bellows made of an animal bladder attached to a wooden or bone tube were replaced by a piston-and-cylinder device of copper or porcelain, which was known as a clyster. Itinerant clysterers plied their trade throughout France, and at Versailles courtiers collected deluxe pearlized and silver models, which they used up to three times a day. Louis XIV, a colossal eater, has been nicknamed the "Moon King" for holding court while an attendant administered one of the two thousand scented purges he is said to have enjoyed during his long reign. (Poisoned clysters became a popular murder weapon for the aristocracy; one would rather not imagine how these dark deeds were avenged.)

Fads in hygiene are as cyclical as other fashions, and in the late nineteenth century the colonic was promoted in America by messianic doctors and reformers who reasoned that a dirty colon posed a health hazard similar to that of an overtaxed sewer system, breeding putrefaction and disease that were reabsorbed into the body. Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the cornflake pioneer, was a leading proponent of this theory, which was called autointoxication, and is still being debated on some of the two million Web sites that surface when you Google "colonic cleansing." Many, like Blessed Herbs, advertise do-it-yourself irrigation kits that start at ninety dollars, and they are often linked to articles on past-life workshops and spiritual healing. Grateful consumers claim to have been cured of symptoms ranging from constipation and flatulence to abdominal pain, parasites, indigestion, hemorrhoids, acid reflux, impotence, headaches, backaches, acne, lethargy, candida, bad breath, bloating, mood swings, P.M.S., obesity, and food cravings. (Debunkers of these products and services don't hesitate to describe them as money "flushed down the toilet.") Users also proudly post descriptions, some with snapshots, of the shimmering fecal garlands—several feet long—that they have expelled.

My favorite account, "The Enema Within," was written for the *Guardian* several years ago by Ian Belcher (not a pseudonym), a British journalist who gamely spent a week fasting at a spa in Thailand. His photographer, another laddish Brit, cheated on the diet but stuck to the cleansing protocol, a literal exercise in inner awareness which involved squatting over a colander in the toilet bowl of his bungalow, then sifting through its contents with a pair of chopsticks. One time, he found a marble that he'd swallowed as a five-year-old.

Commercials for Liquid-Plumr offer a fair preview of what you can expect from a colonic. You lie on a slightly inclined table, covered with a sheet, while a plastic hose, connected at one end to an irrigation machine that looks like a Rube Goldberg device and at the other to a sterile speculum, is introduced into the pertinent orifice. The hydrotherapist massages your abdomen while making disarming small talk and fiddling with knobs that release the filtered water and adjust its pressure. In the course of about forty minutes, which are bearable but unpleasant, a twenty-gallon stream is pumped as high as possible into your large intestine, the lower end of the digestive tract—five serpentine feet of muscled gut where excess liquid is absorbed and acid-forming bacteria break down whatever food has reached this netherworld undigested.

Under normal conditions, which is to say, alone in your bathroom with a magazine, peristaltic contractions eliminate the debris, but during a colonic it is evacuated through a transparent tube, so that you can, if you choose, get a good look at the gunk. When you haven't eaten for three days, the mystery of where it all comes from, how old it is, and what it has been doing up there gives you pause. A free colonic is included in We Care's basic spa package, but clients are encouraged to book a series, and, ideally, to purge once a day, to weigh themselves before and after each session, and to watch the live action in a mirror that is hung at a convenient angle. One hearty sluice was enough for me. I lost a pound, and felt a primal sense

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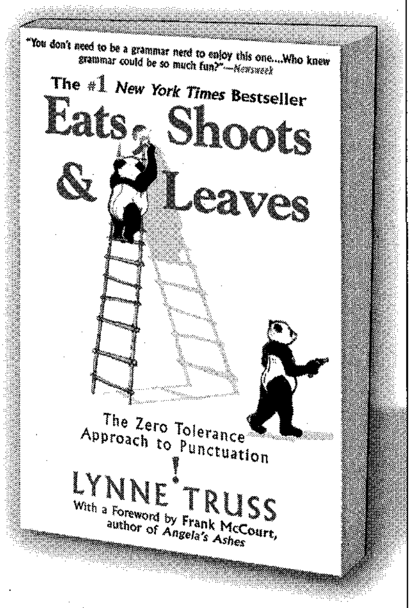
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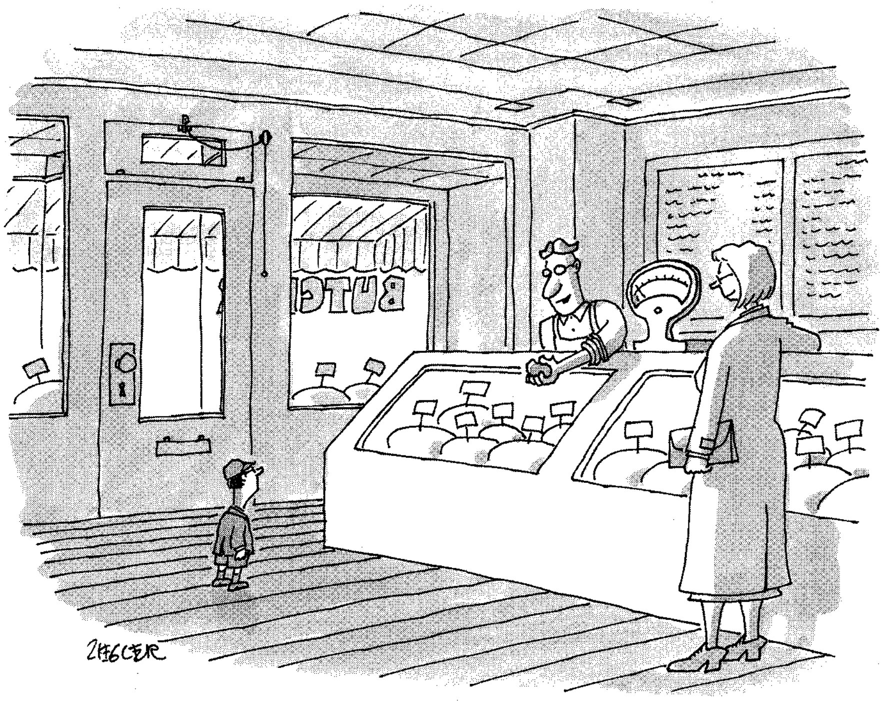


"Who wants a little treat tartare?"

• •

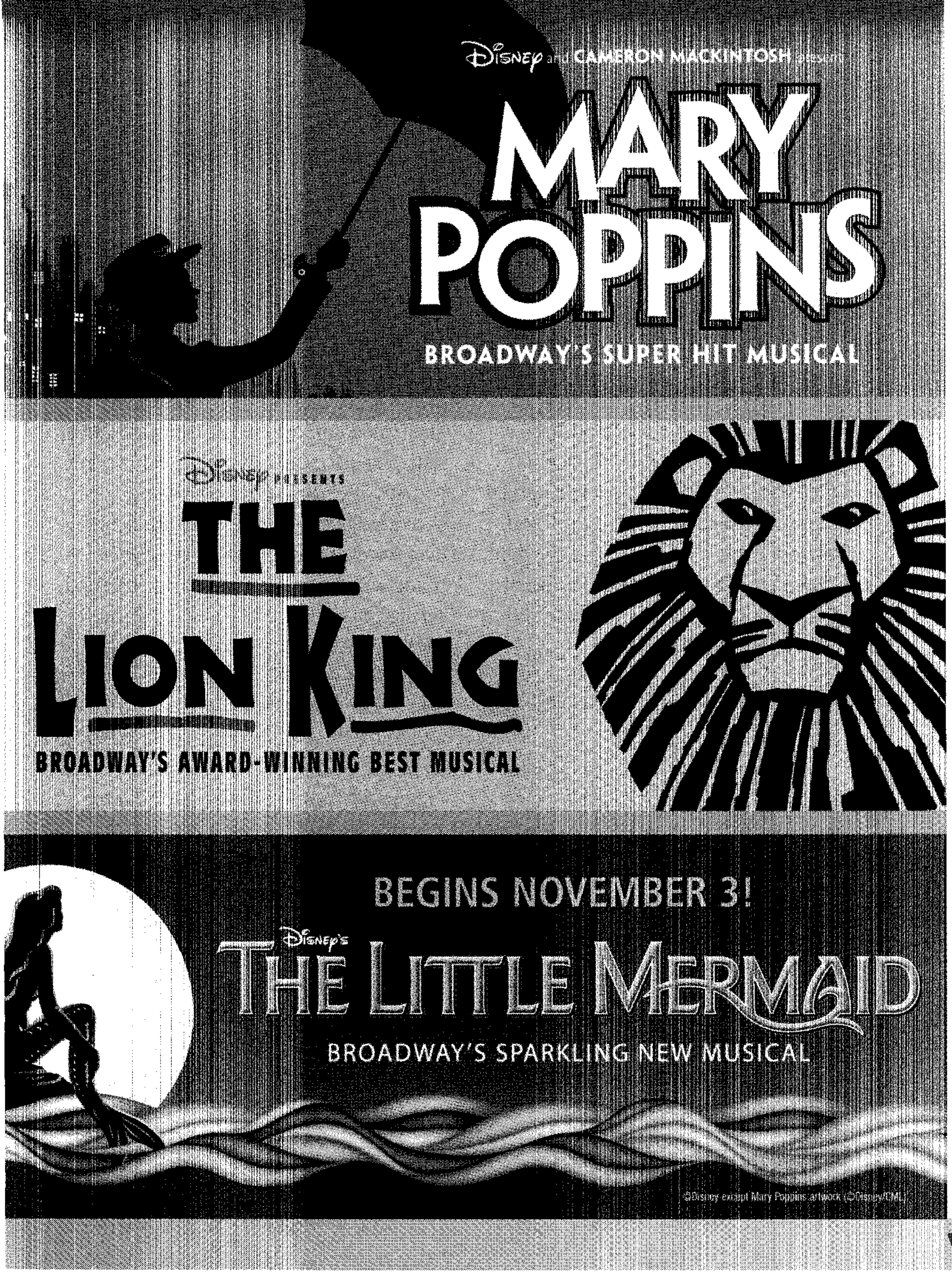
of accomplishment (although the last time I can recall sharing such a triumph with another person I was sitting on a potty). When I thought about it later—the images are hard to forget—I realized that a colonic may be more cathartic as metaphor than as therapy. Who among us doesn't harbor strange dark things that we yearn to get rid of but can't reach?

I left We Care in excellent spirits, squeaky-clean inside and out, with bright eyes, a flat stomach, and skin like a rose petal. Then my flight to Newark was diverted, and by the time I landed I had substituted Martinis for acetoacetate. When I weighed myself a week later, I had regained the four pounds that I'd left in the desert, and, one by one, the frazzled old me and her bad habits returned, mind and body going their separate ways. But the highs that you achieve through struggle and the ones you ingest are not equal—your nerves know the difference. By spring, I found myself dreaming of escape to an élite commando-style spa off the coast of Brazil, recommended to me at We Care by a connoisseur, where, she said, you hike through the rain forest for hours, at a breathless pace, then kayak through open seas back to the base camp. Unfortunately, it required a longer stay than I could finesse, and probably also more muscle tissue than I can afford to cannibalize, so I settled for a brief juice fast in the Catskills.

I had heard about New Age Health Spa, then called New Age Health Farm, thirty years ago, from my first and favorite mother-in-law, a former dancer and acrobat. She lived mostly on a raw diet and grew wheatgrass in the back of a VW camper that she and her companion, a sweet-tempered wrestling champion, took on road trips every summer. They toured health-food conventions, where they sold organic drinks and did some discreet proselytizing, mainly by example, for a way of life—green and self-sufficient—that they saw as preventive medicine for most of the body's and the planet's ills. The wrestler is now in his late sixties. My ex-mother-in-law is eighty, but you'd never know it, and their ardor, I hear, is undimmed.

Even in the seventies, New Age specialized in juice fasting and colonics. The current owner, Stephanie Paradise, who bought the property with her husband in 1986, transformed it into a full-service health resort on two hundred and eighty bucolic acres, with the atmosphere of a summer camp. A counsellor's personality, sunny and patient, seems to be a criterion for employment. There are two swimming pools, one winterized, and a large modern gym, where yoga and exercise classes are taught. Forty kinds of herbs, sprouts, and salad greens come from a greenhouse on the property. Spa treatments continue until nine at night, and "hydro-colon therapy" is among them. Valerie Meyers, the coördinator of the nutrition program, told me that "most people elect to have one colonic in the course of a short fast, and two or three if they're juicing for a week, but it's a matter of personal choice." No rock stars or supermodels, or, for that matter, anomalous human specimens at the extremes of glamour's bell curve were in sight at New Age during my stay, and the spa isn't equipped, Meyers said, for guests with serious medical problems. The clientele is predominantly female—"for the most part, healthy people who come to lose a little weight, and transition to better eating habits." They seem like the kind of women whose reading groups help support the waning business of publishing first fiction, and whose notion of alternative reality is Republican politics.

Only five of the sixty or so guests in residence at New Age were there to fast, and one was a newscaster enjoying a rest not only from her job but from its nightly grooming routine and heavy makeup. The spa considers a two-day digestive cool-down on a rabbit's diet sufficient preparation, and recommends a day of realimentation with the same fibrous nibbles for every two days of abstinence. We chose our juices from a seasonal menu of fresh fruits and vegetables, which were squeezed to order three times a day, and prettily served with an edible flower and a little parasol. (At lunch and dinner, we got "dessert"—a small glass of prune juice.) The sweetness of the nectars gave me energy for the classes and nature walks, but I also had the impression that they were diluting the bile that fuels my critical faculties. I got up early for the guided meditation group, and stayed up late in my cottage, reading until I fell asleep. Thus I enjoyed three virginal days and dreamless nights, which passed quickly, in a trance of docility. They were, in retrospect, more of a vacation than my weekend at We Care, at half the cost, though less of an initiation. Something was missing, but I'd rather not know what. ♦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FAMILY DINNER

GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

On Easter Sunday of 2005, my grandmother died, of very old age. During the flight to Rochester, where she had lived for sixty years, I was reading Amitav Ghosh's novel "The Hungry Tide," which takes place in the Sundarbans: an estuarine region of southern Bangladesh, one of the last places on earth where humans are occasionally consumed by tigers. A young couple sat next to me on the plane, holding hands. The woman explained that she'd recently moved from Dhaka to Rochester, after meeting her fiancé on an international dating Web site. I told her that the novel I was reading took place in the Sundarbans.

ANTHONY RUSSO

"That's funny," she said. "I was born in the Sundarbans. My grandmother still lives there." Then she asked why I was going to Rochester. "My grandmother lived there," I said.

We exchanged contact information, and a few weeks after I got home I received an e-mail from Farah:

> Nell, one day we can make plans and visit the Sundarbans together! How about it? It will be exciting. I would feel honored if I can show you the place. Actually it's my grandmother's place!

Farah and I made our trip to the Sundarbans last February, with her parents and her husband, Dave. Farah had considered staying in a local guesthouse, but her grandmother was indignant at the suggestion. "My nanu and my auntie have been cooking for three days," Farah warned us, as we travelled south by bus from Dhaka. "Better to starve ourselves on the way."

Farah's nanu lives with her third daughter, Auntie No. 3, in a spacious concrete house, lemon yellow with green shutters, in the midst of neat mud-and-thatch dwellings. Nanu came to the gate in a lavender sari, with an expression of wonder, as if she hadn't really expected her granddaughter to appear.

"She says she used to soothe my crying and wipe my bottom," Farah translated. "Would we really have insulted her by staying anywhere else?"

As soon as we arrived, a young bearded man scaled one of the coconut palms, a machete tucked into his looped-up lungi. A small crowd gathered to watch us slurp the juice and scoop the meat with scraps of shell. There was Pajhi ("naughty") Nanu, who likes to tell jokes about sex, and whose mouth is perpetually blood-red from chewing *paan*. There was Mickie, Farah's young cousin, who had dressed up in a blue-and-gold shalwar kameez.

"When I left, you were a village girl!" Farah exclaimed, half teasing. "What happened?"

Dave and I wanted to know everyone's name and who was related to Farah.

"*Everyone* in this village is my relative."

"But who is that?"

"Oh," Farah said, "that's some other nanu. This village is full of nanus."

Auntie No. 3 had been cooking all day on a wood-burning mud stove; periodically she would yell for the servant, and a dangerously gorgeous girl with kohl-rimmed eyes would appear, bearing an armload of kindling. From that stove, with space for only two pots, came seven courses, including fried eggplant, shredded beets so spicy they made our eyes water, flavorful yellow *dal*, *pulao* made with short-grained village basmati, *tangra* (a type of catfish), and a duck (now curried) that we had recently encountered in the courtyard. We sat at a farm table in a low-ceilinged room adjoining the kitchen, dim with wood smoke; Farah's parents ate with us, but Nanu and Auntie didn't eat until after their guests had finished. The savory dishes were interspersed with sweet ones, including a thick egg-and-coconut curry, *am shocktar khata*, made with mango that had been rolled in palm matting with sugar and then dried in the sun.

"This is delicious," Dave and I kept telling Auntie No. 3, using the phrase that was the cornerstone of our limited Bengali. Farah had also taught me to say "I'm full," and eventually I had to say it. Auntie No. 3 looked at me as if I'd broken her heart. "Maybe a little more."

Auntie fed Dave and me *pakan* pita by hand, something no one else at the table seemed to find unusual. After the meal, she washed my right hand in a tin basin, rubbing my fingers between her own.

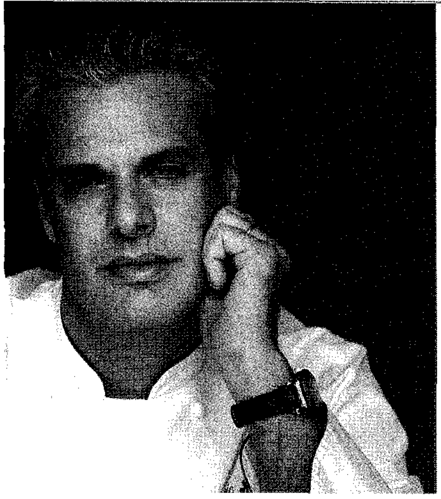
Later, everyone crowded into the main room of Nanu's house, around the lantern, and visitors stopped by; the important ones were fed. That night, the most distinguished visitor was a handsome mustached singer, dressed in a white shirt and lungi.

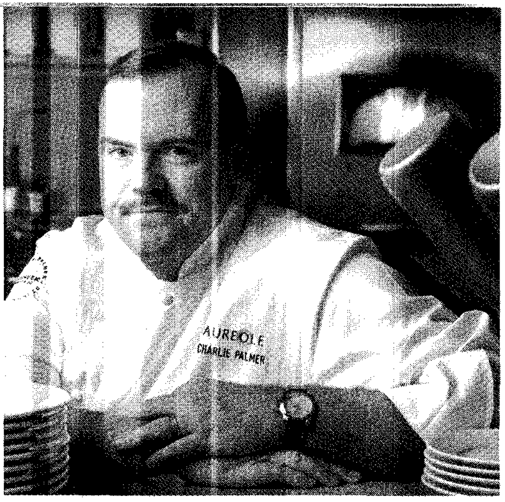
"Will he sing something?"

"He's shy," Farah said. But once he opened his mouth he held our gaze with his, so that we were the ones who felt shy.

More people crowded in to hear him, old women with covered heads and bright-red mouths—grandmothers upon grandmothers.

—*Nell Freudenberger*





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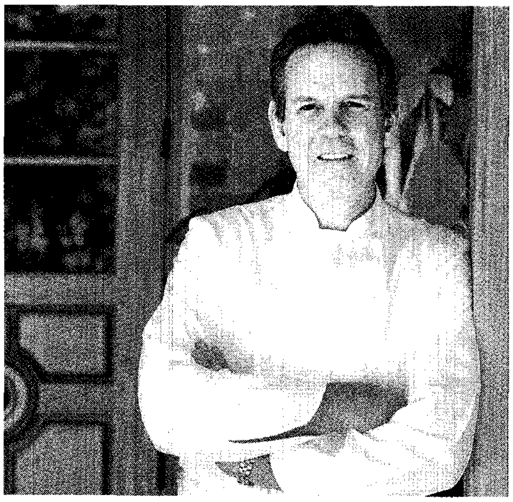

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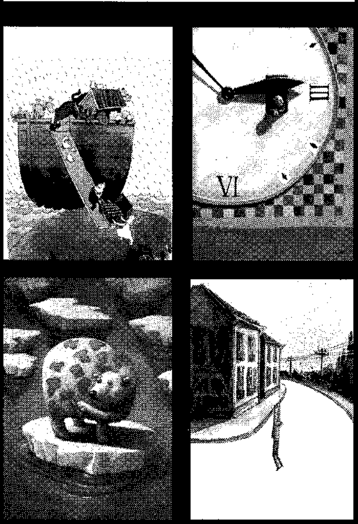

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PERSONAL HISTORY

MY LIFE LIST

In affectionate memory of William Shawn.

BY JOHN McPHEE

My life list is in no way comparable to Sandy Frazier's, and I hope that anyone reading this will not even faintly imagine that I am presuming otherwise as I go on to mention my own modest history with eccentric food. In this field, Sandy is an idol—certainly my idol, probably your idol. He it was who improved his understanding of wild trout by filling his belly with brown-drake mayflies, chewing thoughtfully while they fluttered on his tongue ("If you're into mayflies, it's hard to eat just one"). He it is whose acquired tastes run to things like grasshopper juice and cricket thighs ("the feel of the cricket's toothpicky legs between my teeth"). A gift of chocolate-covered ants and bees appealed to him less for the chocolate than for the "chitinous crunch." Long known in these pages as Ian, a name unfairly thought to be a sign of personal aggrandizement, he reads Leviticus for the sheer pleasure of its culinary attention to "unclean creeping things." That phrase belongs, Lord knows, to Leviticus, for it could never be from Sandy, who is incapable of writing such a description of anything, anywhere, that can qualify as protein.

I am simply not in his league, and prefer my place on the sidelines, admiring what I see. I mean, yes, when I was eight years old in the Vermont fish hatchery I used to swallow little two-inch whole trout—toss them high in the air and stagger around under them and catch them wriggling in my open mouth—but I never reached the point of eventual development implied by that early promise. When Sandy eats something that you don't find at ShopRite, at least not for sale at ShopRite, he does it for the art of it—in his word, the "show" of it—while I only do it for a living. I've eaten things like dock, burdock, chicory, chickweed, snapper eggs, porpoise, and mountain oysters, but almost always in the line of duty—on-the-job consumption. If I am out working and some novel thing is set in front of me, I'll eat it. But some novel thing is not often set in front of me, which is one reason that I defer so completely and uncompetitively to Sandy's amazing record, beside which I'd have little to show but several pounds of grizzly bear.

Its taxonomic name is *Ursus horribilis*, but that, for sure, is not how it tastes. About thirty years ago in Alaska in early spring, Mike Potts, a trapper, asked me to help him write a brochure for dogsled trips he wanted to sell to tourists from the Lower Forty-eight. Since I wouldn't take his money (in part because he had none), he paid me in food. One evening, the fare included fresh shoulder of grizzly, fried in its own raging fat by his wife, Adeline, and set on a table in their cabin, in Eagle Indian Village. A couple of days earlier, Potts and another trapper had been on the Fortymile River, and returned to Eagle by canoe, a journey that took them out of Alaska and into Yukon Territory and back into Alaska on the Yukon River.

> The bear was walking upwind, downriver, looking the other way—just on the Canadian side of the border. The two raised their rifles, fired, and knocked it into the United States. Halved at the waist, it has been hanging in Potts' butchery, a few steps from his cabin. . . . Burgundy is the color of the grizzly's flesh. With the coat gone, its body is an awesome show of muscular anatomy. The torso hangs like an Eisenhower jacket, short in the middle, long in the arms, muscles braided and bulging. The claws and cuffs are still there. A great deal of fat is on the back. The legs, still joined, suggest a middle linebacker, although the thought is flattering to football.

Adeline would not eat the *shar-cho*—in Hungwitchin (her language), the brown, or grizzly, bear.

> She will eat lynx, she said, which is "just like turkey," and wolf, which recalls canned beef. But not this, never this meat. There might be taste but there was terror in the bear.

Adeline cooked a platter of moose and set it on the table beside a platter of bear—two large mounds of sliced meat at least eight inches high. In addition to the three of us, a couple of other people were present. You reached for the meat with your

WILD LIFE PIE
Ralph Steadman '07

RALPH STEADMAN

own fork. Steadily, the pile of grizzly meat diminished, not so the moose.

> The moose was tough. I ate little of it. The grizzly was tender with youth and from a winter in the den. More flavorful than any wild meat I have eaten, it expanded my life list—muskrat, weasel, deer, moose, musk ox, Dall sheep, whale, lion, coachwhip, rattlesnake . . . grizzly. And now a difference overcame me with regard to bears. In strange communion, I had chewed the flag, consumed the symbol of the total wild, and, from that meal forward, if a bear should ever wish to reciprocate, it would only be what I deserve.

The rattlesnake was canned. The flag of Alaska is dark blue behind gold stars that form the constellation of the Great Bear.

Soon after the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed, in 1971, which resulted in the reorganization of Alaskan land on a vast and complex scale, I developed a strong desire to go there, stay there, and write about the state in its transition. When I asked William Shawn, *The New Yorker's* editor, if he would approve and underwrite the project, his response was firm and negative. Why? Not because it was an unworthy subject, not because *The New Yorker* was over budget, but because he didn't want to read about any place that cold. He had a similar reaction to Newfoundland ("Um, uh, well, uh, is it cold there?"). Newfoundland, like Florida, is more than a thousand miles below the Arctic Circle, but Mr. Shawn shivered at the thought of it. I never went to work in Newfoundland, but, like slowly dripping water, I kept mentioning Alaska until at last I was in Chicago boarding Northwest 3.

The first long river trip I made up there was on the Salmon and the Kobuk, on the south slope of the Brooks Range. At some point, I learned and noted that the forest Eskimos of that region valued as a great delicacy the fat behind a caribou's eye. (I am recycling this anecdote and the one that follows from a tribute to Mr. Shawn that appeared in the issue of December 28, 1992.) Pat Pourchot, of the federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (in recent years Alaska's commissioner of natural resources), had organized the river trip and collected the provisions. Pourchot's fields of special knowledge did not include food. For breakfasts, he brought along a large supply of Pop-Tarts encrusted in pink icing and filled with raspberry jam. This caused me, in the manuscript ultimately delivered to the magazine, to present from the banks of the Kobuk River a philosophical choice:

> Lacking a toaster, and not caring much anyway, we eat them cold. They invite a question. To a palate without bias—the palate of an open-minded Berber, the palate of a travelling Martian—which would be the more acceptable, a pink-icinged Pop-Tart with raspberry filling (cold) or the fat gob from behind a caribou's eye?

There was in those days something known as "the Shawn proof." From fact-checkers, other editors, and usage geniuses known as "readers," there were plenty of proofs, but this austere one stood alone and seldom had much on it, just isolated notations of gravest concern to Mr. Shawn. If he had an aversion to cold places, it was as nothing beside his squeamishness in the virtual or actual presence of uncommon food. I had little experience with him in restaurants, but when I did go to a restaurant with him his choice of entrée ran to cornflakes. He seemed to look over his serving flake by flake to see if any were moving. On the Shawn proof, beside the words quoted above, he had written in the wide, white margin—in the tiny letters of his fine script—"the pop tart."

So I have no idea by what freakishness of inattention Mr. Shawn had approved my application, a few years earlier, to go around rural Georgia with a woman who collected, and in many cases ate, animals dead on the road. She actually had several agendas, foremost of which was that she—Carol Ruckdeschel—and her colleague Sam Candler in the Georgia Natural Areas Council were covering the state in quest of wild acreages that might be preserved before it was too late. Under this ecological fog, Mr. Shawn seems not to have noticed the dead animals, let alone thought of them as anybody's food, but I was acutely conscious from Day One of the journey and Day One of the writing that my first and perhaps only reader was going to be William Shawn. It shaped the structure, let me tell you. Where to begin? With the weasel we ate the first night out? Are you kidding, I asked myself, and did not need to wait for the answer. This was an episodic narrative of eleven hundred miles—embracing an isolated valley in the Appalachian north and Cemocheckobee Creek, in the far south—and I could start in the shrewdest possible place in a structure to be shaped like a nautilus by chronological flashback. Where to begin? Near Hunger and Hardship Creek, on the Swainsboro Road, in Emanuel County, we had come upon a dying turtle—a snapping turtle. There had been a funny scene with a sheriff who tried to shoot the turtle at point-blank range and missed. A turtle is not a weasel. Snapping turtles are not unknown to commercial soupmakers. Weighing a snapping turtle against weasels and water moccasins did not require consultation. The scene on the trip that had followed the turtle was a stream-channelization project—no food for squeamishness there. And after the turtle and the channelization I could go off into the biography of the central figure (Carol Ruckdeschel) and I'd have managed what turned out to be eight thousand words of a Shawn-wise beginning before I had to start over and eat that weasel.

I turned in the manuscript and went for a five-day walk in my own living room. The phone rang.

"Hello."

"Hello, Mr. McPhee. How are you?" He spoke in a very light, very low, and rather lilting voice, not a weak voice, but diffident to a spectacular extent for a man we called the iron mouse.

"Fine, thank you, Mr. Shawn. How are you?"

"Fine, thank you. Is this a good time to be calling?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I liked your story . . . No. I didn't like your story. I could hardly read it. But that woman is closer to the earth than I am. Her work is significant. I'm pleased to publish it."

> Carol measured the weasel. She traced him on paper and fondled his ears. His skull and skin would go into the university's research collection.

As a research biologist, she gathered skulls and pelts for Georgia State University, whose students in their labs wore them out so quickly that they needed frequent replacement.

> With a simple slice, she brought out a testicle; she placed it on a sheet of paper and measured it. Three-quarters of an inch. Slicing smoothly through the weasel's fur, she began to remove the pelt. Surely, she worked the skin away from the long neck. The flesh inside the pelt looked like a segment of veal tenderloin.

"Fresh pepper spray?"

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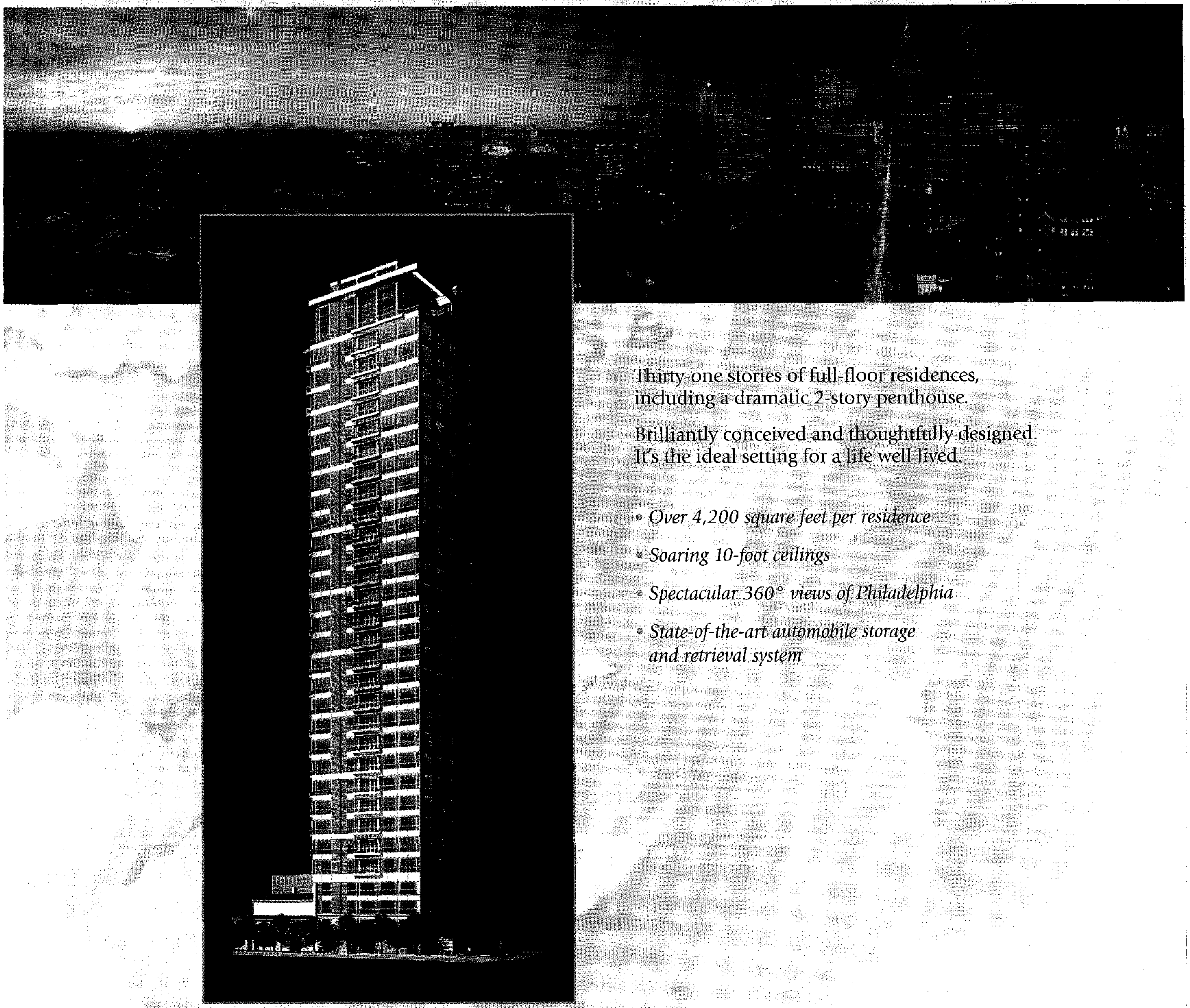

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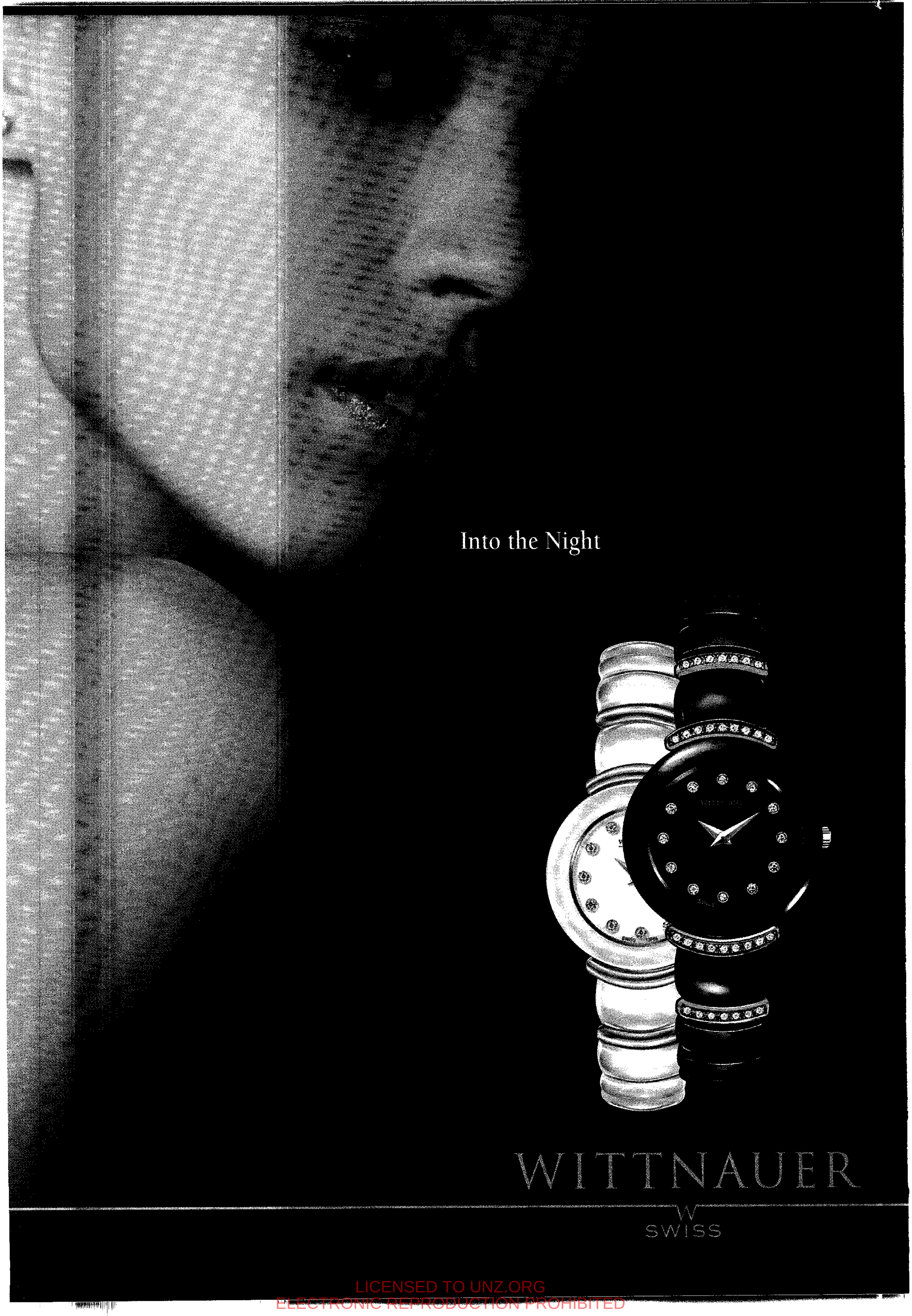
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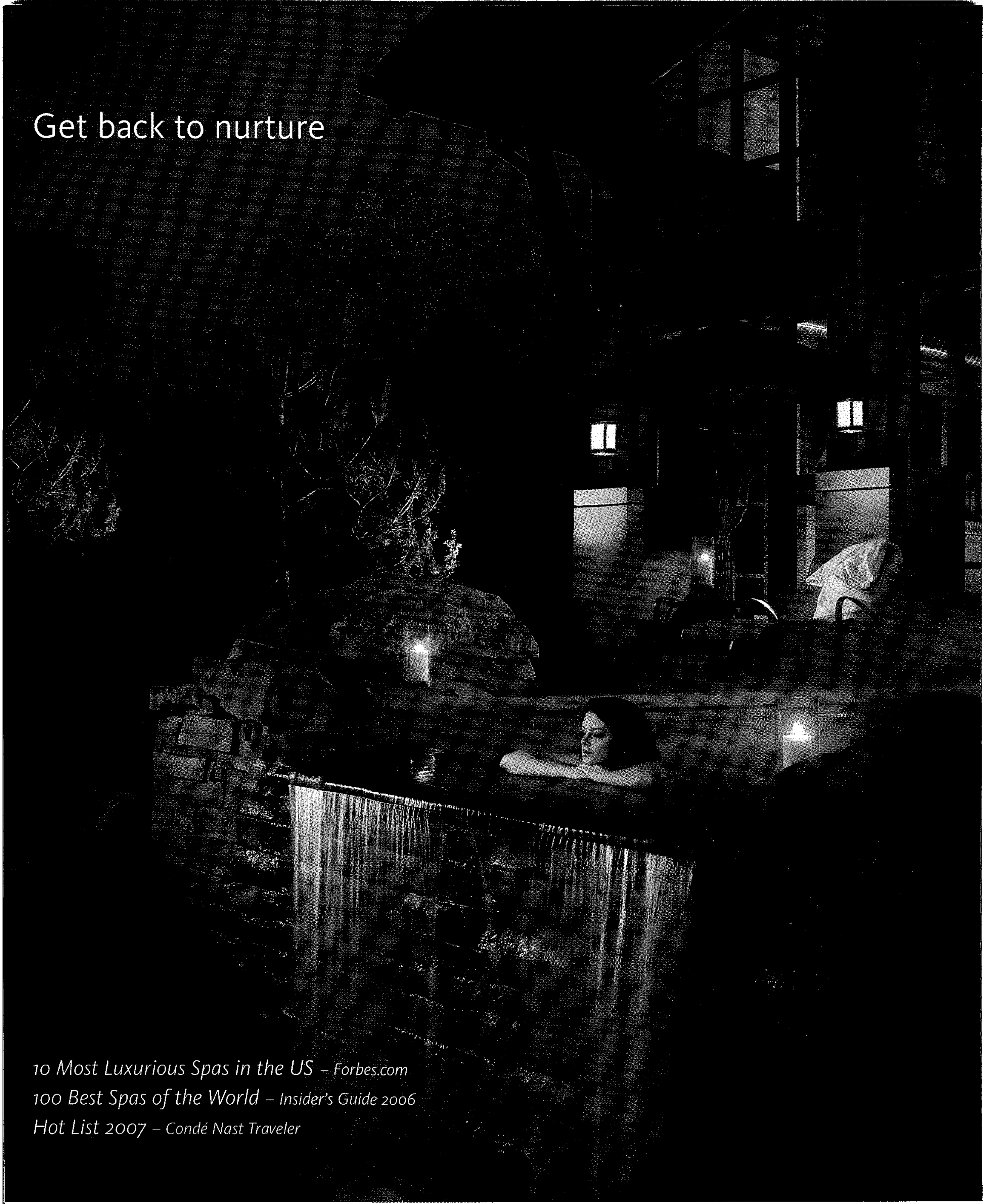
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"I lived on squirrel last winter," she said. "Every time you'd come to a turn in the road, there was another squirrel. I stopped buying meat. I haven't bought any meat in a year, except for some tongue. I do love tongue." While she talked, the blade moved in light, definite touches. "Isn't he in perfect shape?" she said. "He was hardly touched. You really lose your orientation when you start skinning an animal that's been run over by a Mack truck."

"Fine, thank you, Mr. Shawn. How are you?"

Carol put the weasel on the tines of a long fork and roasted it over the coals. "How do you like your weasel?" Sam asked me. "Extremely well done," I said. Carol sniffed the aroma of the roast. "It has a wild odor," she said. "You *know* it's not cow. The first time I had bear, people said, 'Cut the fat off. That's where the bad taste is.' I did, and the bear tasted just like cow. The next bear, I left the fat on." The taste of the weasel was strong and not unpleasant. It lingered in the mouth after dinner. The meat was fibrous and dark.

A reading from the Book of Leviticus, the eleventh chapter, verses 1-3: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat." 20-23: "All fowls that creep, going upon all four, shall be an abomination unto you. Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you." 29-30: "These also shall be unclean unto you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth; the weasel, and the mouse, and the tortoise after his kind, and the ferret, and the chameleon, and the lizard, and the snail, and the mole."

No one west of Hoboken needs to be told what mountain oysters are, least of all Scott Davis, a Union Pacific engineer, who was driving not a train but his Suburban when the subject came up between us, east of the Laramie Range. We were on our way through falling snow to Bill, Wyoming, to catch a coal train to Black Thunder Mine, and Scott said he was sort of hungry for mountain oysters. He knew a place in Douglas where we could get them. It had been a while since his last testicle.

I must have been telling him about Chris Collis, a Nevada brand inspector whose work I had once described, and about an evening I spent with Chris and his family in a small mountain valley above seven thousand feet, where the Collises kept sixty-seven head of their own cattle. Chris, Karen, and their children—Christopher, Gerry, and Eleni—were there to round up and brand calves. Watching them from a corral fence, I scribbled notes:

Full-blood Saler bull calf, roped on one hind leg, screaming. Dad lifts him, flips him, marks his ears. He slices off the tip of the scrotum as if he were scissoring the tip of a cigar. He squeezes into the light the pearl-gray glistening ellipsoid oysters. He does not cut the cords but works them with the blade—scraping, shaving, thinning until they part. The process greatly reduces loss of blood. The calf's eyeballs, having rotated backwards, are two-thirds white. . . . "Who's going to eat the oysters?" Christopher says. Calf No. 6 is also a bull. These are not young calves, and they are hard to hold. They weigh at least three hundred pounds. At last, this one is stretched out, bawling, tongue protruding far, eyeballs largely white. From the bunched animals across the corral a cow emerges, boldly approaches the people and the prostrate calf, and smells it. Identification positive. He is hers. She goes on snuffling him but does not become aggressive. "Some cows would try to hook or butt you," Chris remarks. Six-year-old Eleni . . . is holding the vaccination gun and the antiseptic spray. "Get behind him," her father tells her, accepting the vaccine. He tries to hand her the oysters. She says firmly, "I don't want 'em." Soon Gerry is carrying a cup of oysters. Hereabouts, they appear on menus as entrées. "They are real rich, like sweetbreads," Chris says. "You've probably had mountain oysters before. You cook them in a Dutch oven. You brown them in oil and garlic, and bake them. They are also called fries."

At the Plains Restaurant, in Douglas, Wyoming, they were called mountain oysters. You would not compare them to Teuscher *truffes*. They looked, however, like a generous plateful of filled chocolates that had been left out in the sun. They met Scott's expectations, and, actually, mine. Taste like? They tasted like mountain oysters. If I were forced to compare them to a common food, I would call them grilled macho chicken hearts. I did not get up from the table prepared to screw my weight in wildcats.

After a research trip to the Vestmann Islands, in Iceland, I brought two puffins through U.S. customs at Newark. They weighed down my suitcase, but de-

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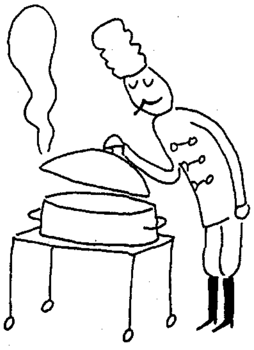
claring them slipped my mind. One puffin was fresh, the other had been smoked. I bought them in a grocery store on Heimaey (hay-may), an island about seven miles off Iceland's south coast. Puffins are regarded as adorable birds, and I am not unmindful of the hostile correspondence this story could arouse. But, stranger, stay thy hand. Iceland has more puffins than Frank Perdue had chickens in his lifetime. There are a million puffins in the Vestmann Islands alone.



Islanders collect puffin eggs by belaying down the faces of sheer high cliffs and filling baskets. When they collect living puffins, they are sitting in niches or hanging from ropes as well. They eat them smoked, salted, boiled, or fried. Pall Helgason, of Heimaey, said, "Puffins, women, and wine are alike. The older they grow, the better they taste." A fisherman in the harbor told me that he roasts his puffins for one hour, turns the oven off, and removes the puffin thirty minutes later. He also boils puffins in salt water—a two-hour simmer with the lid on. Hot on my plate one evening at the Hotel Gestgjafinn were three smoked puffin breasts—dark brown, smooth, and leathery. They were as red as wine inside. Their taste was an almost exact cross between corned beef and kippered herring. They were served with large cubes of butter, boiled small potatoes, and thin slices of sweet pickle.

Not many years before, a long fissure had suddenly opened on Heimaey, running through grazing land, low and flat, and pouring forth incandescent lava. Before long, a volcano stood there—seven hundred feet high. The lavas that produced it spread over farms and into town and threatened to enter and destroy Iceland's most important fishing harbor. The nation fought the lava with fire hoses, saving the harbor. The lava deeply buried or otherwise obliterated two hundred buildings.

Under the lava is Olafshus, home of the late Erlendur Jonsson, master catcher of puffins. Olafshus had territorial rights to Alfsey, which is two miles from Heimaey. He and a crew of three or four sat in high niches in the dizzying cliffs of Alfsey, and with long-handled nets caught puffins in flight. In a four-week season, Erlendur would be content if he returned to Olafshus, and his wife, Olafia, with twelve thousand puffins. Olafshus went very quickly under the lava. The puffin is among the nation's emblematic birds. With its bright-white chest, its orange webbed feet, and its big orange scimitar bill, it could be an iced toucan.

From Alaska, I flew to Newark with moose meat one time—actually, mooseburger, given to me in a five-pound block by Ed and Ginny Gelvin, who lived in Central, about a hundred miles northeast of Fairbanks. They had raised their children on moose, and used it in just about every form in which "Joy of Cooking" calls for beef. Our own children were young and, in those days, were on the approximate level of William Shawn as venturesome eaters. The solution to this problem was simple. I shaped the moose meat into patties, grilled them over charcoal, and set them on the table without comment.

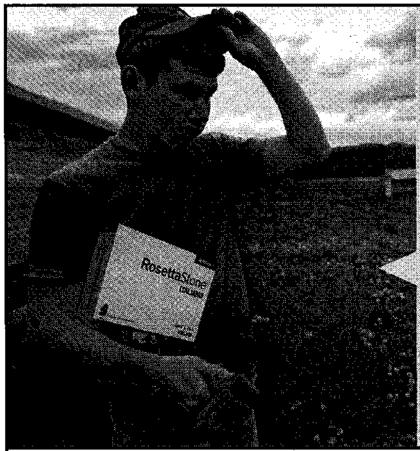
Once, also, I took a Yukon River king salmon—a forty-pound chinook—out of Jim Scott's gill net in the eddy under Eagle Bluff, wondering if I could get it to New Jersey in an edible state. We froze it whole in Jim's freezer in Eagle, and it stayed there long enough to get pretty far up the mineral-hardness scale. On the morning when the mail plane was coming and would take me away, we wrapped the big king in enough insulation material to make it look like some sort of mummy. The month was July. The Fahrenheit temperature, in this hottest and coldest region of Alaska, was in the seventies. The mail plane, a Cessna, showed up. I put the fish in it and flew to Fairbanks, two hundred miles. Because I wasn't leaving Fairbanks for a day or two, I took the fish to a restaurant and checked it in to the restaurant's freezer. The itinerary from Fairbanks to Newark was in two parts—overnight to Sea-Tac and an early-morning plane east. The salmon went as checked baggage. In Newark, I waited by the baggage rack, and waited, and at last the king salmon appeared among the suitcases. I did not inspect it. Outside the terminal, the temperature was above ninety. You could drink the air. I had been met by my wife, Yolanda, and we put the fish in the car and drove the forty miles home. In the stifling heat of our back hall (my middle initial, A., does not stand for air-conditioning), I unrolled the many layers of Jim Scott's insulation. The fish hit the floor and damned near cracked the bricks. It was as hard as granite. We made gravlax.

I should finish the story about the mooseburger. The kids ate it without comment, their gentle chatter focussed on their usual weighty topics. When they reached for more burgers, I told them they were eating an Alaskan moose. "Eeeeeeee!" "Uhhhhhhh!" "Gross!" "Disgusting!" A few of them still talk to me.

The longest time I ever lived on foraged wild food came about in this manner: While I was in college, I was the left-handed catcher on a summer softball team that represented the Gallup Poll. Joshua L. Miner III, our shortstop, was a local schoolteacher who later taught at Gordonstoun, in Scotland, and returned to the United States bringing Outward Bound with him. He was its original American director. His first two Outward Bound schools were set up in Colorado and Minnesota, then he added one on Hurricane Island, in Maine. I went there with him to scout the scene for a possible piece for *The New Yorker*, and among the people Josh introduced me to was Euell Gibbons, who was teaching students how to survive on nothing but foraged foods—not a particularly large challenge in summer on an island in Penobscot Bay. Back in the office in New York, I asked to see Mr. Shawn, and went in and told him about my visit to the island, and proposed a long fact piece on the Outward Bound movement. He said, slowly and politely, "Oh." After a time, he added, "Oh, that would not be for us." He said Outward Bound reminded him of Hitler Youth. Gibbons, though, sounded interesting. Why not just go off somewhere—somewhere other than Outward Bound—with Euell Gibbons, and do a Profile of him? The fact that Gibbons wrote about edible wild vegetation to the exclusion of almost all animal tissue but blue-eyed scallops had not been lost on Mr. Shawn. So, in mid-November, 1966, I went off with Gibbons from his home in Troxelville, Pennsylvania, and spent nearly a week canoeing down the Susquehanna River, backpacking on the Appalachian Trail, and living on dock, burdock, chicory, chickweed, ground-cherries, groundnuts, dandelions, and oyster mushrooms, among many other things we foraged. For me, as a survivor on wild food, that personal best was only a few days. Euell, in an earlier phase of his life, had lived exclusively on foraged food for three years.

For dinner on the first night—beside the river, blowing white streams of breath—we consumed boiled whole dandelions, boiled Jerusalem artichokes, ground-cherry salad, and pennyroyal tea. The dandelions were on the old side and tough. The ground-cherries, of the nightshade family, seemed to me to have "the flavor of tomatoes, with a wild, musky undertone."

Gibbons: "These things are not substitutes for tame foods. They have flavors of their own, and it is not fair to them to call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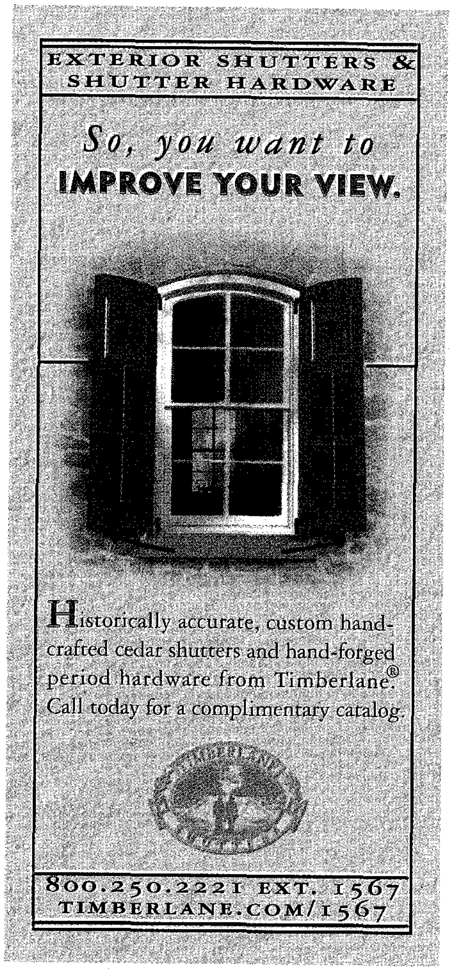

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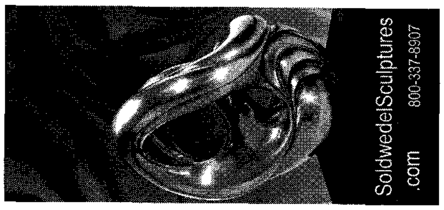

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them by the name of something else."

"Jerusalem," in this context, was a corruption of the Italian *girasole.*

Gibbons: "These are not artichokes. They're sunflower tubers."

With a knife and fork, he laid one open and then scooped up a mound of the white flesh. It was steaming hot. "Boy!" he said. "That goes down very gratefully. Just eating greens, you can get awfully damn hungry. We'll eat plenty of greens, but we need these, too."

For breakfast, we had watercress, cattail sprouts, chicory greens, burdock roots, persimmons, and water-mint tea.

He warned me that breakfast is the roughest meal to get through on any survival trip, because that is usually the time when the wild foods are most dissimilar from the foods one is used to at home.

For our first lunch, lying on a gravel bar, we had had walnuts, hickory nuts, and persimmons. For our second lunch, on the shore of a big island, we had walnuts, hickory nuts, watercress, and persimmons.

Like people in all parts of the country, we were eating essentially the same lunch we had had the day before, and it was not much of a thrill.

Before dinner, we had catnip tea.

He said that catnip is a mild sedative, and I drank all I could hold.

Then, in addition to dandelions, we ate oyster mushrooms, big as saucers. Thick, steaming, and delicious, they had the aroma of oyster stew and the taste of grilled steak. Or so it seemed. In the morning, foraging a few hundred yards from the river, we found a patch of ground that a farmer's plow could not reach because of a bend in a very small stream. On that fifth of an acre, we found wild mustard, lamb's-quarters, chickweed, wild spearmint, catnip, winter cress, groundnuts, and off-the-scale dandelions.

"This is the best dandelion field I've ever got into," he said as he pried one after another out of the earth. "I've seen *cultivated* dandelions that weren't as big as this!"

Lunch: boiled dandelion crowns, walnuts, and catnip tea sweetened with sugar. He had made the sugar eight months before, in Troxelville, and we had brought it with us intending—after the first couple of days—to introduce condiments into our diet, one per meal.

"I've made sugar from the sap of red maples, silver maples, Norway maples—hell, yes—and from walnut trees, butternut trees, sycamores, black birches. This? This is sugar-maple sugar. This is living."

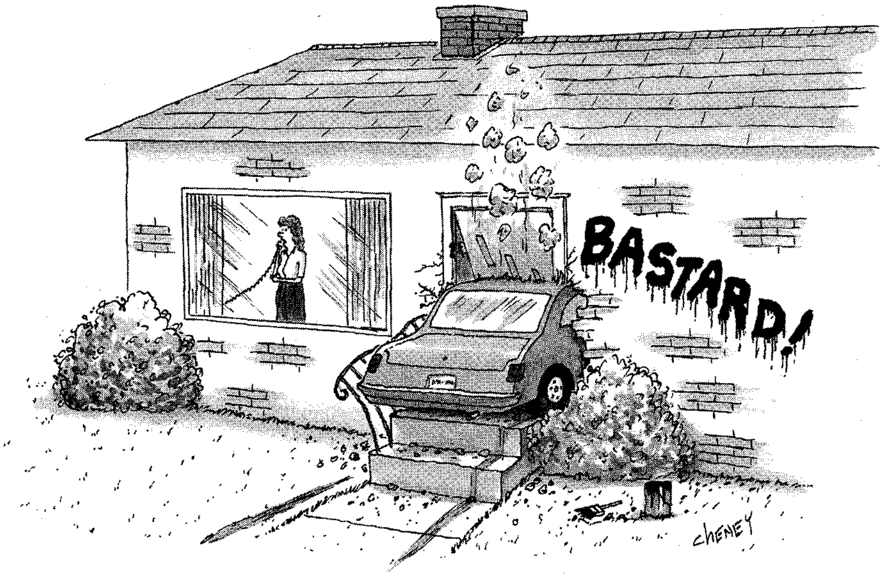
After stashing the canoe and heading south from Clarks Ferry on the Appalachian Trail, we spent the night at a lean-to shelter, where we introduced vegetable oil.

The night was going to be clear and cold, and we kept the fire high. By seven, when Gibbons had the two frying pans out and was beginning to sauté dandelion roots in one and sliced groundnuts in the other, the temperature at the open end of the lean-to was below freezing and the temperature at the closed end was almost a hundred degrees. The distance between these extremes was eight feet. Gibbons seemed at home there, cooking, with his face baking and his back freezing, and the dinner he served was outstanding—wild-spearmint tea, piles of crisp dandelion-root tidbits, and great quantities of groundnuts so skillfully done that they seemed to be a refinement of home-fried potatoes. Having fried food was an appealing novelty. We were hungry, and we ate as rapidly as Nilotic tribesmen, without conversing. Gibbons looked up once and said, "The Smithsonian has a very good man on starchy roots." Then he went on eating.

After the coldest night I have ever spent anywhere, below or above the Arctic Circle, we sustained ourselves on wintergreen berries, winter cress, mallow cheeses, wintergreen tea. Witch-hazel tea. White-pine-needle tea.

It had in its taste the tonic qualities of the scent of pine, but it was not at all bitter. I had imagined, on first trying it the night before, that I would have a feeling I was drinking turpentine. Instead, I had had the novel experience of an unfamiliar taste that was related to a completely familiar scent—a kind of direct translation from one idiom to another.

My daughters consider me the least observant person they know ("A rhinoceros could walk through the living room and he wouldn't notice it")—a claim that is not unsupported by the fact that I have never seen a rattlesnake in the wild. In Western states for forty-odd years I have been going into rattlesnake terrain and not seen one. I have slept on their ground. I have walked ridges where I was told to step carefully because rattlesnakes would be everywhere like earthworms after rain. With a sedimentologist, I went up a trail to an outcrop in Iowa past a sign that said "EXPECT TO SEE RATTLESNAKES." No apparent rattlesnakes. In Atlanta, I shared a room with Carol Ruckdeschel's young diamondback rattlesnake, Zebra, but he was living in a big jar and didn't count. On Cumberland Island, off the Georgia



"Oh, and your ex stopped by."

• •

coast, Sam Candler, who has spent much of his life there, was telling me one day about having discovered a timber rattler under the driver's seat of his Jeep. The Jeep was in motion when he made the discovery and he was the driver. The rattlesnakes of Cumberland Island are thicker than fire hoses and so numerous they're like earthworms after rain. So I'm told. I told Sam that I had yet to see my first rattler in the wild. "You what?" he said, pulling his beard in disbelief. "You can't be serious."

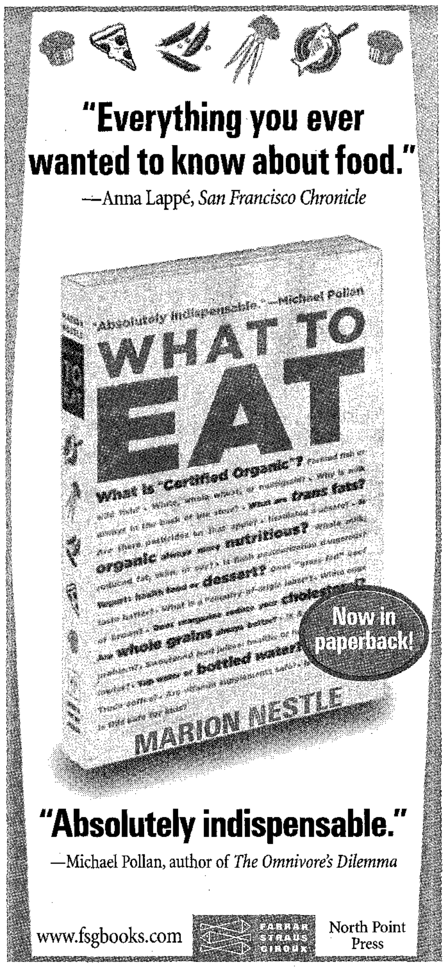
"I'm serious."

"Well," he said, "let's go!" We went outside and got into his Jeep. I looked it over first. Sam knows the name and address of every rattlesnake in the northern five thousand acres of the island. He tells stories unflattering to their intelligence: "If a line of people walks past a rattlesnake, it aims at the first person, strikes at the second, and hits the third." He stopped near a stand of palmettos, walked confidently to the edge of it, and peered in. Nobody home. Near an immense live oak, he showed confidence again. No snake. We drove around for a couple of hours, frequently stopping at rattlesnake loci familiar to him for a lifetime. His confidence ebbed and was replaced by amazement.

The Rocky Mountain geologist David Love, who generously made field trips with me and camped with me and taught me the structure and stratigraphy of Wyoming, was no less surprised than Sam Candler. David had grown up in the geographical center of the state on a ranch from which no other buildings were visible to the distant horizons. A man named Bill Grace, wanted for murder, had come through the ranch one evening when David and his brother were young boys. Their parents knew who Grace was, and did not think ill of him for killing a man who had it coming to him. The boys knew that Grace was wanted for murder. Their mother asked him to stay for dinner. The boys happened to have come upon and killed a five-foot rattlesnake earlier in the day. Their mother served it creamed on toast. The boys were cautioned sternly by their parents not to use the word "rattlesnake" at any point during the meal.

> They were to refer to it as chicken, since a possibility existed that Bill Grace might not be an eater of adequate sophistication to enjoy the truth. The excitement was too much for the boys. Despite the parental injunction, gradually their conversation at the table fished its way toward the snake. Casually—while the meal was going down—the boys raised the subject of poisonous vipers, gave their estimates of the contents of local dens, told stories of snake encounters, and so forth. Finally, one of them remarked on how very good rattlers were to eat.
>
> Bill Grace said, "By God, if anybody ever gave me rattlesnake meat I'd kill them."
>
> The boys went into a state of catatonic paralysis. In the pure silence, their mother said, "More chicken, Bill?"
>
> "Don't mind if I do," said Bill Grace.

My life list of exotic food is not some-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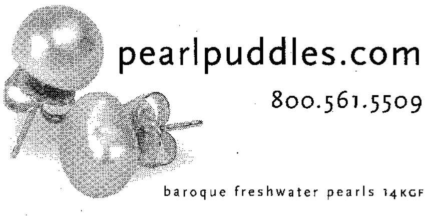
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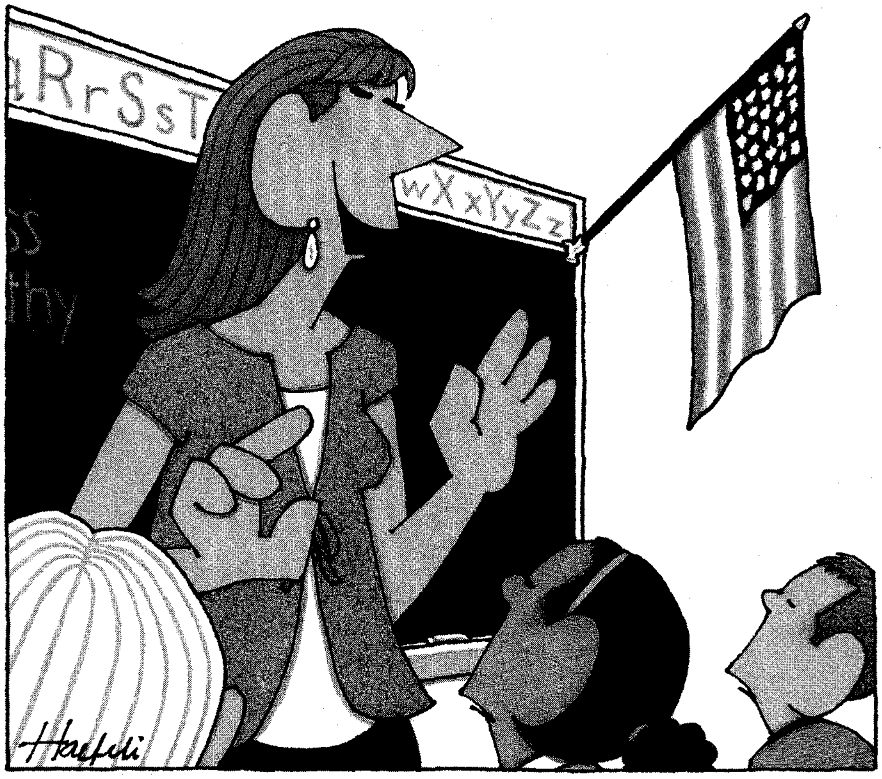
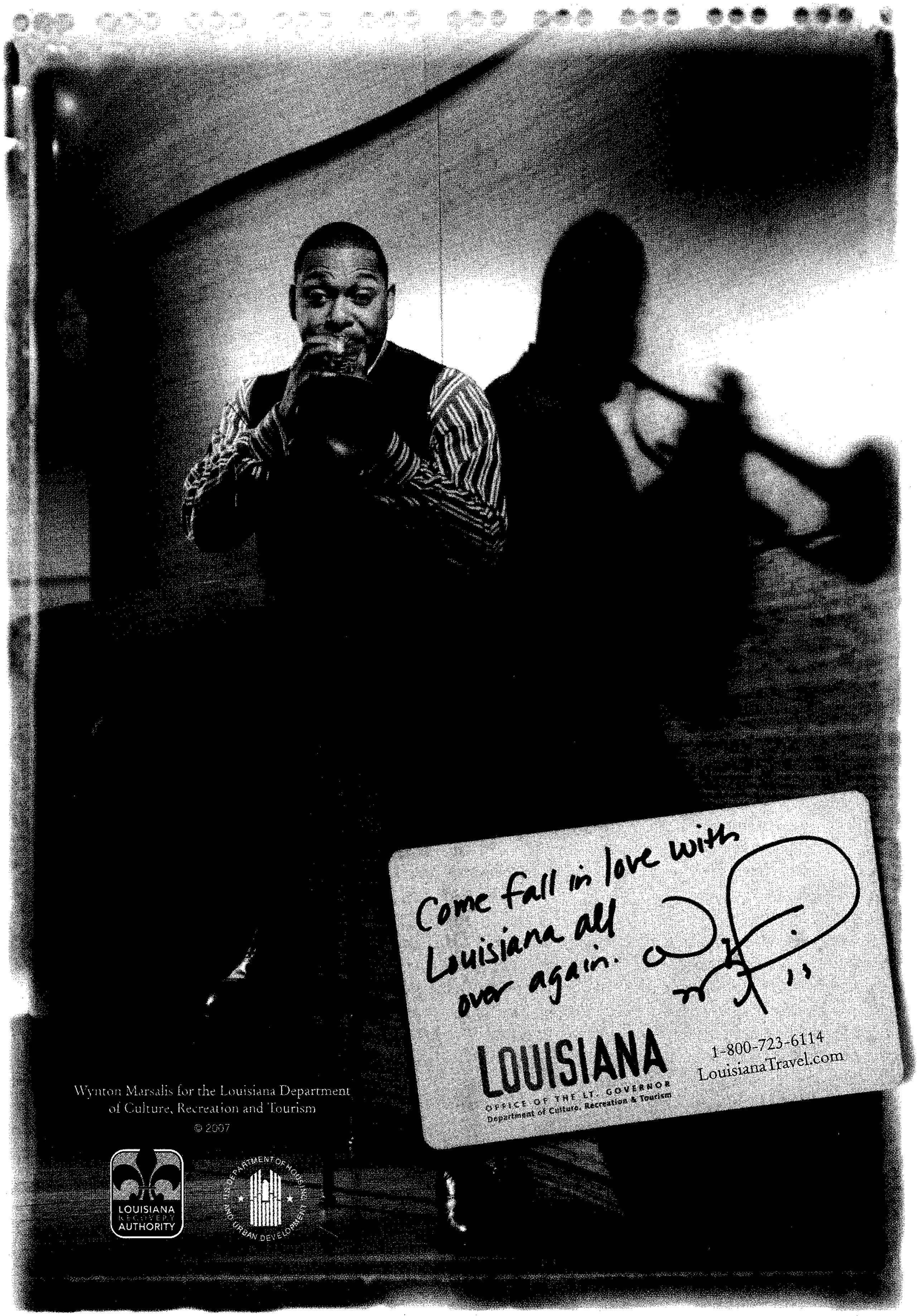
thing I feel compelled to increase. I have no kinship with list-conscious birders who get into their vans and drive round-the-clock because someone somewhere has sighted an endangered warbler. I simply do not think like that. So I ate ostrich at the 1906 Restaurant, in Callicoon, New York. So what? Ostrich is a specialty there, and it's arterially correct. So I stretched the list a little by eating cow tendons, fermented white soybeans, fermented black soybeans, stewed conch, sea cucumbers, and durian at my friend Andrew Co's Sakura Express, on Witherspoon Street in my home town. So what? Durian, also known as monthong, is a fruit that smells strongly fecal and tastes like tiramisu. Sea cucumber, the holothurian echinoderm, has a muscular body and an extensive respiratory tree that soften deliciously in steam, becoming somewhat gelatinous and not unlike ox marrow. I ate lion and whale when I was nineteen years old on separate visits to Keen's English Chop House, on Thirty-sixth Street. I was gathering experience. Betsy Candler, whose husband is Sam, cooked porpoise one time and withheld its identity until she had asked what I thought I was eating. I said, "Whale." On another occasion, when she grilled a coachwhip, I didn't know it from a corn snake. Under cross-examination, though, I would have to admit that last summer certain terminal frustrations may have come into play when I went into a restaurant in Denver and ordered rattlesnake. Buckhorn Exchange, 1000 Osage Street—on the walls enough stuffed heads to make a quorum in the House of Representatives. I was with grandchildren and I still have the check: "6 sarsaparilla. 1 rattlesnake."

Monica Wojcik, an '07 Princeton graduate who, in her senior year, ran the Boston Marathon and, with her mother, the San Francisco Marathon, once gave me a drink of bee spit before we went off on a sixteen-mile bike ride. She called it bee spit but it was actually synthetic hornet juice—Vaam brand, available only in Japan. Liquid essence of *Vespa mandarinia japonica*, it had been the beverage of choice of Naoko Takahashi on her way to her gold medal in the Olympic marathon at Sydney. Monica's father brings it home to his athlete wife and daughters from business trips to Tokyo. Monica's mother, Jane Wojcik, has run marathons in twenty-three of the fifty states, now and again after training on bee spit. In powder form, it comes out of a silvery packet and quickly dissolves in water. Characters covering the packets tell some of the bee-spit story. *Vespa mandarinia japonica*—the Japanese giant hornet—flies about a hundred kilometres a day ingesting but not digesting small insects, which it carries home in globular form to feed to its larvae. The juice that goes for the gold is in the larvae. While the adult feeds the larvae, the larvae reciprocate with fresh juice, a blend of seventeen amino acids. The acids rapidly burn the adult hornet's abdominal fat, releasing the energy on which the adult flies another hundred kilometres ingesting small insects. Vaam, vaam, thank you, Ma'am—Vespa amino-acid mixture. If you are not into cycling or marathon runs, you can sit on a sofa, drink Vaam, and lose weight. Monica primed me with another glass of bee spit before another sixteen miles, a week or two later. To be honest, it failed to turn me into Barry Bonds. I cannot say that it was any more effective than the shot of bourbon I have every night before dinner. But it put a new entry at the top of my life list:

bee spit
burdock
caribou
catnip tea
cattail sprouts
chickweed
chicory
coachwhip
conch
Dall sheep
dandelions
deer
dock
durian
grizzly
ground-cherries
groundnuts
Jerusalem artichokes
lamb's-quarters
lion
mallow cheeses
moose
mountain oysters
musk ox
muskrat
ostrich
oyster mushrooms
pennyroyal tea
persimmons
porpoise
puffin
rattlesnake
sea cucumber
snapping-turtle eggs
water-mint tea
weasel
whale
white-pine-needle tea
wild mustard
wild-spearmint tea
winter cress
wintergreen berries
witch-hazel tea ♦



"Who knows the words to the theme song of the United States?"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FAMILY DINNER

REAL FOOD

ANTHONY RUSSO

I was nine years old, sitting stiffly at the dining table in my blue-and-white school uniform, and across from me sat my mother, who had come home from work at the university registry, elegant in her swishy skirt, smelling of Poison perfume and saying she wanted to watch me eat. I still do not know who told her that I was skipping lunch before school. Perhaps it was the houseboy, Fide. Perhaps it was my little brother Kenechukwu, who went to school in the morning and came home just before I left. The firm set of her mouth told me that I had no choice but to eat the *garri* and soup placed on the table. I made the sign of the cross. I plucked a morsel from the soft lump of *garri*. I lightly molded it with my fingers. I dipped it into the soup. I swallowed. My throat itched. I disliked all the variants of this quintessential Nigerian food, whether made from corn, cassava, or yams, whether cooked or stirred or pounded in a mortar until they became a soft mash. It was jokingly called "swallow," because one swallowed the morsels without chewing; it was easy to tell that a person chewing *garri* was a foreigner.

"Hurry up," my mother said. "You will be late for school." We had *garri* for lunch every day except Sunday, when we had rice and stew and sometimes a lush salad that contained everything from baked beans to boiled eggs and was served with dollops of creamy dressing. The soups gave some variety to lunch: the yellowish *egusi*, made of ground melon seeds and vegetables; *onugbu*, rich with dark-green bitterleaf; *okro*, with its sticky sauce; *nsala*, with beef chunks floating in a thin herb-filled broth. I disliked them all.

That afternoon, it was *egusi* soup. My mother's eyes were steady behind her glasses. "Are you playing with that food or eating it?" she asked. I said I was eating. Finally, I finished and said, "Mummy, thank you," as all well-brought-up Igbo children were supposed to after a meal. I had just stepped outside the carpeted dining area and onto the polished concrete floor of the passage when my stomach churned and recoiled and the *garri* and soup rushed up my throat.

"Go upstairs and rinse your mouth," my mother said.

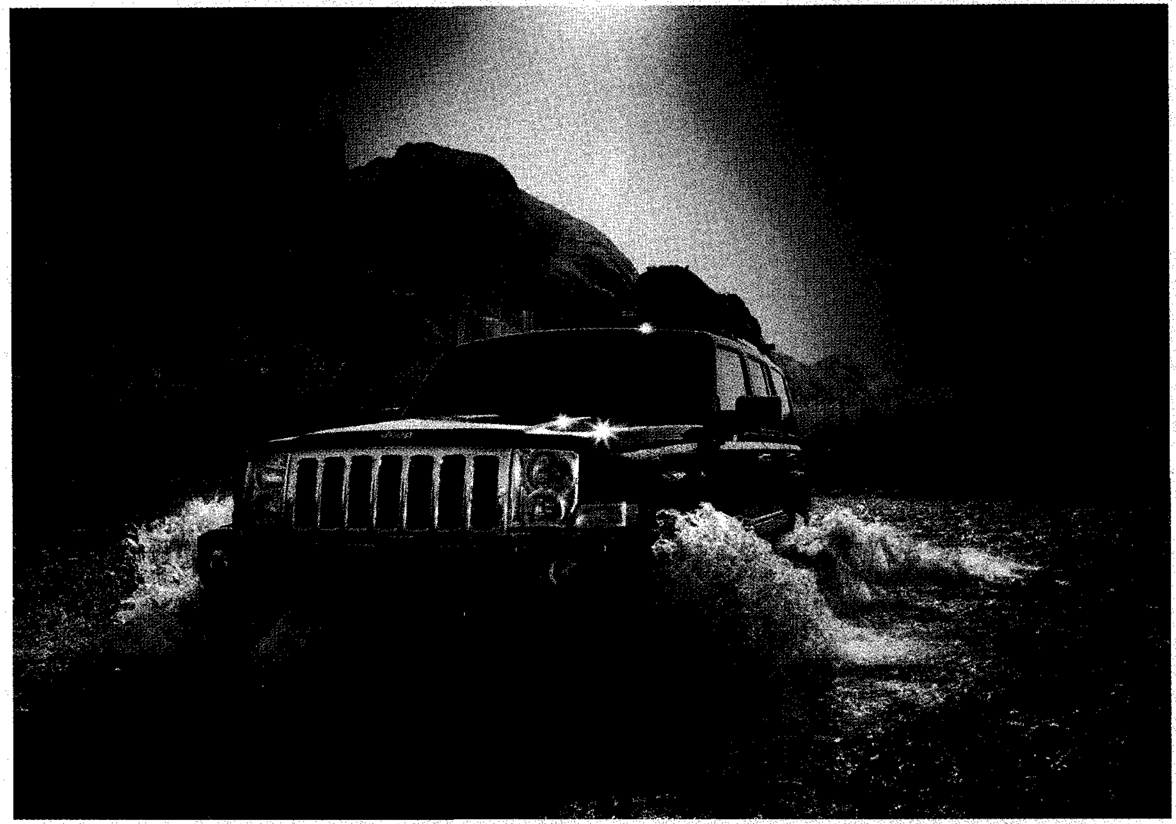
When I came down, Fide was cleaning up the watery yellowish mess, and I was sorry he had to and I was too disgusted to look. After I told my mother that I never ate *garri* before school, that on Saturdays I waited until nobody was looking to wrap my *garri* in a piece of paper and slip it into the dustbin, I expected her to scold me. But she muttered in Igbo, "You want hunger to kill you," and then told me to get a Fanta from the fridge.

Years later, she asked me, "What does *garri* really do to you?" "It scratches my throat," I told her, and she laughed. It became a standing line of family teasing. "Does this scratch your throat?" my brothers would ask. Following that afternoon, my mother had boiled yams, soft and white and crumbly, made for my lunch; I ate them dipped in palm oil. Sometimes she would come home with a few wraps of warm *okpa*, which remains my favorite food: a simple, orange-colored, steamed pie of white beans and palm oil that tastes best cooked in banana leaves. We didn't make it at home, perhaps because it was not native to our part of Igboland. Or perhaps because those we bought on the roadside from the women who carried them in large basins on their heads were too good to surpass.

I wish I ate *garri*. It is important to the people I love: My late grandmother used to want to have *garri* three times a day. My brother's idea of a perfect meal is pounded yam. My father once came home from a conference in Paris, and when I asked how it had gone he said that he had missed real food. In Igbo, another word for "swallow" is simply "food," so that one might overhear a sentence like "The food was well pounded, but the soup was not tasty." My brothers, with affectionate mockery, sometimes ask whether it is possible for a person who does not eat swallow to be authentically Igbo, Nigerian, African.

On New Year's Day of the year I turned thirteen, we went to my Aunt Dede's house for lunch. "Did you remember?" my mother asked my aunt while gesturing toward me. My aunt nodded. There was a small bowl of *jollof* rice, soft-cooked in an oily tomato sauce, for me. My brothers praised the *onugbu* soup—"Auntie, this is soup that you washed your hands well before cooking"—and I wished that I, too, could say something. Then my boisterous Auntie Rosa arrived, her wrapper always seeming to be just about to slip off her waist. After she had exchanged hugs with everyone, she settled down with her pounded yam and noticed that I was eating rice. "Why are you not eating food?" she asked in Igbo. I said I did not eat swallow. She smiled and said to my mother, "Oh, you know she is not like us local people. She is foreign."

—*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*



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LETTER FROM EUROPE

SPICE ROUTES

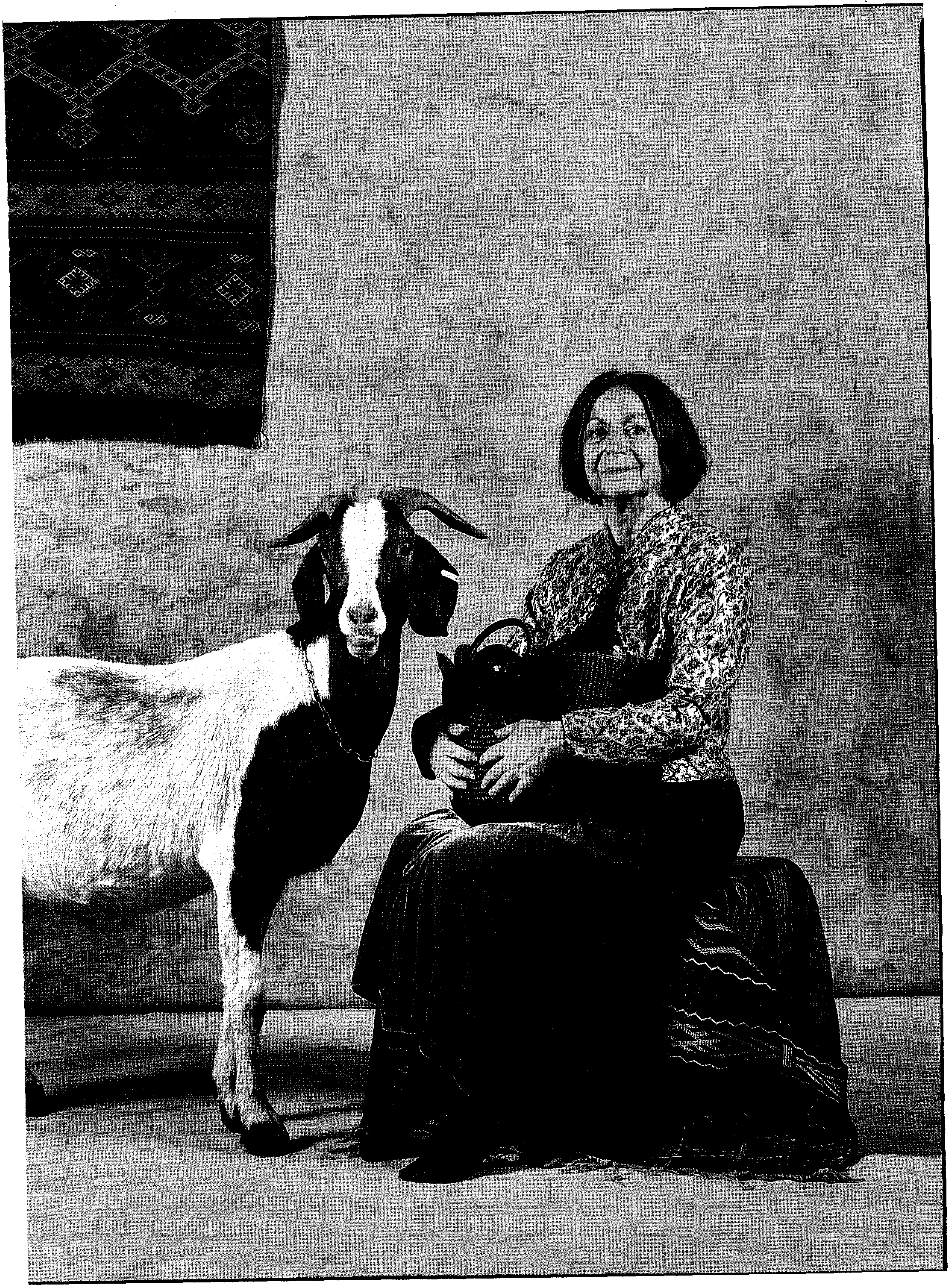
Claudia Roden's culinary diaspora.

BY JANE KRAMER

Some years ago, Claudia Roden was walking down a hall in an apartment house in North London, on her way to a friend's, when she smelled a soup that reminded her of home. Roden was born in Cairo. She has lived in London for more than fifty years, and she carries a British passport, holds respectably British left-wing views, owns a big house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, and has written ten cookbooks in the English language, including "A Book of Middle Eastern Food" and "The Book of Jewish Food," and is finishing an eleventh, about the food of Spain. But if you ask where she's from she says "Cairo" and if you ask her about the soup she says, "*Melokhia*, a soup no one but we Egyptians like"—which, she also says, is why she followed the smell to a stranger's door that day, rang the bell, introduced herself to the Egyptians inside (they were not at all surprised), and was promptly invited in for lunch. She describes the soup in a discouraging, or perhaps proprietary, way: "It's made with a dark-green leaf, like a gelatinous spinach. You find it in all the Egyptian tombs, and now, through DNA, in the mummies' stomachs." But she's wrong about no one except Egyptians liking it. I tried my first *melokhia* at a wonderful London restaurant called Moro, in Exmouth Market, and it was so good that I nearly cancelled the rest of dinner and ordered more. "The *melokhia*? That's Claudia," Samantha Clark, who, with her husband, Samuel, cooks the food at Moro, told me. "Her 'Middle Eastern Food'—when we opened the restaurant, we soaked it up like sponges. There was so much there, and we wanted to learn as much as possible from it. Some of our first menus were written with Claudia in mind, and the soup stayed."

Roden, at seventy, is one of the most revered writers in what the British call "cookery." She is the youngest, and last, of a triumvirate of hungry, highly literate, and ethnographically indefatigable women who helped transform how Britain cooked, and what it cooked, persuading the domestically challenged bourgeoisie of the postwar years that the taste of a good soup held a world of history and culture, and that the pleasures of the table did not stop at the shores of Albion but, in all likelihood, began there. The first of those women was the well-born, fragrantly libertine Elizabeth David, who had discovered the South in the course of a peripatetic wartime love affair, and then, with her books on French and Mediterranean food, produced a culinary revolution in a country where the sale of olive oil was mainly confined to pharmacies, as a balm for earaches, and where saffron, eggplant, and zucchini blossoms had barely entered the vocabulary, let alone anybody's local market. The second woman was Jane Grigson, a modest, amiable translator who had studied at Cambridge and, with her husband, the poet Geoffrey Grigson, spent her summers in a village in the Loire Valley. She put the flair of the French into English cooking, and under her gentle instruction the overcooked Sunday joint became a juicy, garlicky leg of lamb and the leached vegetables got back their flavor. But Roden didn't have to discover the South. She was born to it, at the heady end-of-empire moment when the British controlled Egypt but the markets of Alexandria and Cairo belonged to the Arabs, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Copts, and Jews who lived there, and meals, for the upper classes, were a serious, almost erotically exhausting pleasure. She left Egypt at fifteen, for a boarding school in Paris, and, after a few years of returning for summer holidays, didn't eat

What drives Roden is the realization that through food "you could reconstruct a world." Photograph by John Reardon.



in Cairo again for a quarter century.

Most people meeting Roden for the first time would find her very British. She has peachy skin and a smooth high brow, and at home she wears good, comfortable English country clothes: floppy skirts, pastel cashmere cardigans looped over her shoulders, and sensible shoes. But she is often told that she has an "Egyptian face," and when you look closely you begin to see the East in the upturned curve of her smile and in the dark hair falling from a center part and in the almond eyes. When she is dressed for a party, wrapped in the silky rich blues and reds and purples of her evening clothes, Egypt is unmistakable. Everyone notices her eyes then, because they are rimmed with kohl. She can tell you how the women in the Middle East prepare their kohl. ("In Morocco, you burn a cloth with oil and keep the soot that collects" is one recipe.) But, like her recent attachment to vacuum-packed fish stock and frozen artichoke hearts, her own kohl recipe is updated and efficient. "I turn a Pyrex dish over a candle flame," she says, "and within fifteen minutes I have enough soot for a year of powder."

She comes, in fact, from an old Syrian Jewish merchant family, or, more accurately, from two old Syrian Jewish merchant families, the Doueks (her father, Cesar) and the Sassoons (her mother, Nelly), which had moved their operations to Cairo in the eighteen-nineties, following the cotton trade that opened with the Suez Canal. Two generations later, Nasser seized the canal and began expelling Jews and foreigners. The family today is scattered through Europe and the Americas. The Doueks and the Sassoons, like many Jewish traders in the Middle East, had grown prosperous over the centuries by dispatching their sons to the caravan stops of the silk and spice routes and the shipping ports of India and the Far East; and the most successful had kept their money (and their debts) in the family by marrying off their daughters if not to a cousin or an uncle then to the sons of like-minded and equally prosperous Jewish merchants. The family's business base and, you could say, its reproductive center was Aleppo, where, as Roden will tell you, with a sweet smile, "there have been Jews since Abraham came through Syria with his sheep." Her paternal great-grandfather was the chief rabbi of Aleppo during the last half century of Ottoman rule and, in line with his status and his family responsibilities, had sired an enormous brood—twenty-six children—most of whom multiplied as energetically as he had. Roden has hundreds of cousins and appears to know them all. Her daughter Nadia, an artist and animated-filmmaker who lives in New York, says that the three Roden children grew up convinced that everyone they met besides their classmates and teachers was a relative, or might marry a relative and become one.

Nelly and Cesar Douek arrived in London in 1956 (after a year in Sudan, whose only tangible benefit to the family was a good new recipe for tahini-lemon-and-yogurt cream). Claudia and her two brothers had already been in the city for two years, studying, and on Friday nights the Doueks' house in Golders Green would fill with people of all ages passing through London on their way from Paris or Milan or Geneva to Mexico City or Los Angeles or Barranquilla—wherever the émigrés of the latest Sephardic diaspora had chosen to re-start their lives. They spoke French—the language of choice among the Cairene bourgeoisie—slipping in and out of Arabic or English or Italian, depending on where they had lived, and where they were living now. Some of the old women spoke Ladino, the Hebrew-Castilian language of the Spanish Jews at the time of the expulsion of 1492. ("Sefarad" means Spain, in Hebrew, and originally referred only to Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin.) Roden calls it "the language of women's secrets."

The women, without servants to cook for them, would sit and gossip in Nelly Douek's kitchen, and Roden began to watch and listen. She says that the first thing one woman would ask another was: What recipes do you have? They exchanged recipes, and sometimes argued about recipes. Was the *kibbeh* better in Aleppo or Damascus? Were the pastries better in Alexandria or Cairo? Roden had no interest in cooking then, but it was clear to her that families like hers, who had left their lives behind in the Middle East, had managed to carry one thing to the West with them—and that was the taste of the food they ate at home. The historian Donald Sassoon, a younger cousin of Roden's and one of her closest friends, describes it this way: "At Claudia's parents', I was captured by a nostalgia that I didn't even feel myself. The house would be full of exiles, going on and on about Egypt. 'Oh, Nelly, the rugs, the jewels, the servants we used to have,' they'd say—though the truth was we didn't have such great carpets in Egypt, and the servants cost nothing, everybody had them. But we hadn't lost our food. Our food was what made us different from the others, it was a way to distinguish ourselves without having to pay the price of 'difference.' Nelly, all those women—they cooked to re-create the Egypt of their youth."

Roden started writing down their recipes. "Even now, whenever I cook I think about how I got the recipe, who gave me the recipe, what their story was," she says. Her "famous orange cake"—a rich Sephardic confection of eggs, sugar, oranges, and ground almonds that has been appropriated by so many other cookbook writers since she included it in "Middle Eastern Food" that she has lost count—was "Iris Galante's, one of the Aleppo Galantes. She was the grandmother of my brother Ellis's first wife, visiting from Italy. I watched her cook—she had a little handwritten book, and I said, 'Can you give me a recipe?' I got a *windfall.* The first recipe was *pastellicos,* from Salonika. That's a little pie, with minced meat or cheese and onions. The French writer Edgar Morin called it the heart of the heart of Salonika. After Iris, I talked to everyone who came to the house. I started with the people from Egypt, and then with my parents' friends from Turkey and Iran. 'How much flour do you use?' I'd ask them. The best answer came from Istanbul, or perhaps it was Izmir: 'Press your earlobe. See how it feels. When the dough feels like your earlobe, it's the right consistency.'"

For Roden, it was an unexpected preoccupation. "In London, I had been free for the first time," she says. "I was a Marxist—of course, I had never *read* Marx—and I went on marches and joined the New Left Club and went to art school at St. Martins. I was going to be a painter, a muralist like Diego Rivera, or a filmmaker—which horrified my parents. Now, suddenly, I was under their jurisdiction again. I lived at home. I took a job, but they hated that. I was in reser-

"You can stop the pain, Marcel. Just show us how to crust a sea bass."

vations at Alitalia, and you could see me through the windows. My father was so ashamed. He wanted me in the house. 'Why do we have girls?' he said. 'Because they're the sunshine of the family.' Whenever Egyptian friends came, he would tell me to call in sick—because for a daughter of the house not to be home when friends came! So, suddenly I was embraced by the émigré world, submerged in it. I was researching my book without even knowing it was a book."

The Doueks thought of their daughter, at twenty-two, as stubbornly close to spinsterhood, having offered her one very eligible cousin to consider, before she was fifteen, and, not long afterward, a "really ugly" businessman from India—both of whom she refused. But one day in 1958 she presented them with a nice young man who, they were somewhat scandalized to learn, had been sharing her table at a café down the street from Alitalia. A year later, she was married. Paul Roden was a self-made businessman from a family of Russian Jewish immigrants. He had gone to work at the age of sixteen, when his father died, and Cesar Douek liked him for that. The family welcomed him, to Claudia's great relief, because for most Sephardic émigrés the Ashkenazi of Northern and Eastern Europe were an almost mythically bewildering people—"peasants" who raised carp in bathtubs for a tasteless dish called gefilte fish and didn't know a cardamom pod from a coriander seed, or, worse, the sort of intellectuals who had brought Zionism to a Middle East where, in the émigrés' wishful imagination, everybody had got along. (Their view of Ashkenazi intellectuals was summed up admirably by Claudia's great-uncle Moussa Douek: "Read and write? I have people who read and write for me.")

The marriage lasted for fifteen years, produced two girls and a boy, and gave Roden back a measure of independence. (She never married again, although by all accounts she was much courted.) More to the point, she had her own kitchen. She learned to cook, and spent the first ten years of her married life collecting and testing the recipes that became "A Book of Middle Eastern Food." "I worked with Jane Grigson and Elizabeth David in mind," she told me. "I had found a *melokhia* recipe in Elizabeth's book on Mediterranean food, then a few more Middle Eastern recipes she had collected. She said, 'This is the tip of the iceberg. Somebody has to take this much further.' So I went to the British Library. 'Are there any Arab cookery books?' I asked. There were not. I wrote to Muslim friends in Egypt, and asked *them.* The only cookery book they could find in Cairo was an old British quartermaster's book from the Second World War, and it was all cauliflower and cheese, macaroni and cheese. So I went to the embassies here and talked to the people waiting. I sat in the Iranian Embassy. They asked me, 'Do you want a visa, or a passport?' and I said, 'No, I'm here for recipes.' I'd go to the big carpet warehouse on the Thames. The men were Iraqis. I would ask for their wives' recipes. All through the sixties, I did that. I was raising a family, and trying to paint—I painted the rabbis of Jerba; you can see them at the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, in Maida Vale—and I even wrote a play about the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi. But mainly I was home taking care of the children, or I was looking for recipes."

She turned out to be a natural scholar, despite an almost insistently idyllic vision of (pre-Israel) Middle Eastern life that, forty years later and to the despair of her friends, remains untempered by reality. ("Of course, I have an attachment to that life," one of them told me. "It was a colonial and cosmopolitan world—that's what made it attractive—but I'm more cynical than Claudia. I have bitter memories.") Simon Schama once wrote that "Claudia Roden is no more a simple cookbook writer than Marcel Proust was a biscuit baker." Her Middle East is an act of imagination, a kind of domestication of memory, and to create it she prowled the stacks of obscure archives. She read historians, anthropologists,

FAMILY DINNER

TASTELESS

One of the things they promise when you quit smoking is that food will regain its flavor. Taste buds paved beneath decades of tar will spring back to life, and an entire sense will be restored. I thought it would be like putting on a pair of glasses—something dramatic that makes you say, "Whoa!"—but it's been six months now, and I have yet to notice any significant change.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Part of the problem might be me. I've always been in touch with my stomach, but my mouth and I don't really speak. Oh, it chews all right. It helps me form words and holds stuff when my hands are full, but it doesn't do any of these things very well. It's third-rate at best—fifth if you take my teeth into consideration.

Even before I started smoking, I was not a remarkably attentive eater. "Great fried fish," I'd say to my mother, only to discover that I was eating a chicken breast or, just as likely, a veal cutlet. She might as well have done away with names and identified our meals by color: "Golden brown." "Red." "Beige with some pink in it."

I am a shoveller, a quantity man, and I like to keep going until I feel sick. It's how a prisoner might eat, one arm maneuvering the fork and the other encircling the plate like a fence: head lowered close to my food, eyes darting this way and that; even if I don't particularly like it, it's *mine*, God damn it.

Some of this has to do with coming from a large family. Always afraid that I wouldn't get enough, I'd start worrying about more long before I finished what was in front of me. We'd be at the dinner table, and, convict-like, out of one side of my mouth, I'd whisper to my sister Amy.

"What'll you take for that chicken leg?"

"You mean my barbecued rib?"

"Call it what you like, just give me your asking price."

"Oh gosh," she'd say. "A quarter?"

"Twenty-five cents! What do you think this is—a restaurant?"

She'd raise the baton of meat to her face and examine it for flaws. "A dime."

"A nickel," I'd say, and before she could argue I'd have snatched it away.

I should have been enormous, the size of a panda, but I think that the fear of going without—the anxiety that this produced—acted like a kind of furnace, and burned off the calories before I could gain weight. Even after learning how to make my own meals, I remained, if not skinny, then at least average. My older sister Lisa and I were in elementary school when our mother bought us our first cookbook. The recipes were fairly simple—lots of Jell-O-based desserts and a wheel-shaped meat loaf cooked in an angel-food-cake pan. This last one was miraculous to me. "A meat loaf—with a hole in it!" I kept saying. I guess I thought that as it baked the cavity would fill itself with rubies or butterscotch pudding. How else to explain my disappointment the first dozen times I made it?

In high school, I started cooking pizzas—"from scratch," I liked to say, "the ol' fashioned way." On Saturday afternoons, I'd make my dough, place it in a cloth-covered bowl, and set it in the linen closet to rise. We'd have our dinner at seven or so, and four hours later, just as "Shock Theater," our local horror-movie program, came on, I'd put my pizzas in the oven. It might have been all right if this were just *part* of my evening, but it was everything: all I knew about being young had canned Parmesan cheese on it. While my classmates were taking acid and having sex in their cars, I was arranging sausage buttons and sliced peppers into smiley faces.

"The next one should look mad," my younger brother would say. And, as proof of my versatility, I would create a frown.

To make it all that much sadder, things never got any better than this. Never again would I take so many chances or feel such giddy confidence in my abilities. This is not to say that I stopped cooking, just that I stopped trying.

Between the year that I left my parents' house and the year that I met Hugh, I made myself dinner just about every night. I generally alternated between three or four simple meals, but if forced to name my signature dish I'd probably have gone with my Chicken and Linguine with Grease on It. I don't know that I ever had an actual recipe; rather, like my Steak and Linguine with Blood on It, I just sort of played it by ear. The good thing about those meals was that they had only two ingredients. Anything more than that and I'm like Hugh's mother buying Christmas presents. "I look at the list, I go to the store, and then I just freeze," she says.

I suggest that it's nothing to get worked up about, and see in her eyes the look I give when someone says, "It's only a dinner party," or "Can we have something *with* the Chicken and Linguine with Grease on It?"

I cook for myself when I'm alone; otherwise, Hugh takes care of it, and happily, too. People tell me that he's a real chef, and something about the way they say it, a tone of respect and envy, leads me to believe them. I know that the dinners he prepares are correct. If something is supposed to be hot, it is. If it looks rust-colored in pictures, it looks rust-colored on the plate. I'm always happy to eat Hugh's cooking, but when it comes to truly tasting, to discerning the subtleties I hear others talking about, it's as if my tongue were wearing a mitten.

That's why fine restaurants are wasted on me. I suppose I can appreciate the lighting, or the speed with which my water glass is refilled, but, as far as the food is concerned, if I can't distinguish between a peach and an apricot I really can't tell the difference between an excellent truffle and a mediocre one. Then, too, the more you pay the less they generally give you to eat. French friends visiting the United States are floored by the size of the portions. "Plates the size of hubcaps!" they cry. "No wonder the Americans are so fat."

"I know," I say. "Isn't it awful?" Then I think of Claim Jumper, a California-based chain that serves a massive hamburger called the Widow Maker. I ordered a side of creamed spinach there, and it came in what looked like a mixing bowl. It was like being miniaturized, shrunk to the height of a leprechaun or a doll and dropped in the dining room of regular-sized people. Even the salt and pepper shakers seemed enormous. I ate at Claim Jumper only once, and it was the first time in years that I didn't corral my plate. For starters, my arm wasn't long enough, but even if it had been I wouldn't have felt the need. There was plenty to go around, some of it brown, some of it green, and some a color I've come to think of, almost dreamily, as enough.

—*David Sedaris*

Arabists, folklorists, philosophers, and poets, hoping for information and inspiration. She spent a year testing a book of thirteenth-century Baghdad court recipes that had been unearthed and translated by an Arabist in Cambridge. She made friends with the French Marxist scholar and Muhammad biographer Maxime Rodinson, who had written his doctoral dissertation on a culinary manuscript from medieval Damascus. "I just got so interested in the history of food, and I was making all those medieval dishes, and it blew my mind—the idea that through food you could describe or reconstruct a world," she says. She ended up reconstructing several worlds—eight hundred recipes, and a trove of folk tales, proverbs, stories, poetry, and local history—and, when she finally sat down to write, it was in a clear, humorous, elegant voice that she hadn't known she had, a voice that could keep you up, nights, reading.

When the book was finished, she went to Foyles and copied the name and address of every cookbook publisher in sight. It was 1967, the year of the Six-Day War, and the Middle East, as she puts it, "was not at all popular just then." She ended up at a small house with an editor who, she was delighted to discover, had been born in Turkey. The book was a sleeper. Its reputation spread in England—"People here were completely *bouleversés* by those tastes," Tom Jaine, at the food journal *Petits Propos Culinaires*, told me—and then to the Middle East, where there were soon so many pirated printings of "Middle Eastern Food" that you could find it in kitchens from Cairo to Beirut and Damascus, and even Riyadh. By the end of 1970, Jill Norman, the cookbook editor at Penguin, had bought the rights to "Middle Eastern Food" and published a paperback edition. ("It walked off the shelves," she told me.) Two years later, her American counterpart, Judith Jones, the editor who discovered Julia Child, published it at Knopf. Roden today counts both women among her best friends, though at the time they were put through their paces at her family dinners (Claudia cooked; Nelly "supervised"), swore to a passion for minced lamb, bulgur wheat, and honey-drenched pastry, and were pronounced relatives. "Nelly was something of a drama queen," Norman told me, "and the food was very grand."

Roden was famous much sooner than she was solvent. Penguins, in those days, sold for a few shillings a copy—which is to say it was not much money for a woman paying the mortgage on a big North London house and trying to raise three children on her own. For two years after her separation, in 1974, Roden gave cooking classes at home, an experience that her son, Simon, describes as six or seven middle-aged English ladies up to their wrists in Iranian rice pudding or Lebanese meatballs, making a mess of the kitchen. The children were alternately amused, irritated (they did the washing up), and impressed by Roden's foray into the world of business stationery and flyers. Simon, a London architect with a wife and two boys, told me, "After my dad left, he went bankrupt. We were on our own. We'd have these guys at the door, like bailiffs, trying to take the TV, but my mom was tough. She shouted them down." His sister Anna, a financial manager with a husband and three girls, says, "Mom could make a piece of broccoli on a plate look lovely, but it was so horrible, that worry." She thinks that even today, ten books and considerable celebrity down the line (a James Beard best-cookbook award; six Glenfiddich awards; and, in Holland, the Prince Claus Fund Award for cultural achievement, the first ever given to a food writer), Roden is marked by those lean years. "If I had one word for my mom, it would be 'martyr.' She won't willingly take a taxi. She refuses to have a housekeeper. Last year, she finally replaced the upstairs carpeting. It took us thirty years to persuade her."

Roden's kitchen remains resolutely unchanged. She calls it "my seventies kitchen," because that was when she put in the countertops and the cabinets and bought the stove and the yellow-and-blue Portuguese splatter tiles and the long table where she spreads whatever recipes she is testing, and does her chopping and peeling and a lot of her entertaining. There are always garden roses and a bowl of mangoes on the table. When a friend stops by, she reaches into the bowl, the way another woman might reach for knitting, feels for the ripest fruit, and starts slicing and peeling while they talk. When she is ready to eat, she simply pushes everything aside, gets some plates, and brings out a loaf of bread, a package of Serrano ham, and maybe some good Spanish anchovies, a dish of roasted peppers, and a bottle of whatever wine she has opened a day or two before. She knows good wine; she is delighted to be served it, but she rarely buys it. She carries the notion of simple table wine to a Mediterranean extreme. Her sink is usually piled with pots and dishes, waiting their turn in the backup dishwasher in her laundry room—an open, converted pantry where every surface is covered with sacks and tins and bottles of the beans, oils, peppers, fish, and spices that she is using to test recipes for her book about Spanish food. A second pantry is entirely given over to the grains and preserves and flower waters that she keeps in stock for Middle Eastern meals. (Her latest, and perhaps most inventive, book, "Arabesque," is devoted to the food of Morocco, Lebanon, and Turkey. She had hoped to include Iran and Syria, and when that was vetoed she threatened, only half in jest, to produce a sequel called "The Food of the Axis of Evil.")

On Sundays, Roden has the family to lunch. In spring and summer, they eat in a big garden, off the kitchen, where the older grandchildren can kick a soccer ball while the younger ones poke through a tangle of overgrown hedges, hoping to catch a glimpse of the two prize pigs that the BBC presenter who lives next door is raising as family pets. Roden uses those lunches to test, and retest, her most problematic recipes, like the one for slow-roasted Andalusian lamb where the lamb ended up swimming in a thin puddle of honey, white wine, and rendered fat. (Her son-in-law, who may have been forewarned, arrived that day with a bag of bread, cookies, and cold cuts from the nearest Marks & Spencer.) "She'll call, she'll say, 'I made it again,'" Anna told me. "We are the 'taste it again' people." Roden presides over the tastings with an indulgent, if somewhat distracted, calm. "You can see why I can't let anyone clean here," she said one afternoon, when I was helping unload the dishwashers and discovered that some of the wooden spoons went into a basket on the kitchen sideboard, and others went into the dining room, thirty feet away; and that the silverware was divided according to some obscure logic among three far-flung drawers. "You see, everything has settled into different drawers and places. You can't put it away. Everything would end up in the wrong place. I would never find it."

In 1980, Roden began thinking about her book on Jewish food. By then, she was finishing two more books: a short history of coffee and a pleasant, idiosyncratic foray into alfresco food called "Picnic," which ran the gamut from Hong Kong barbecue to Glyndebourne-on-the-grass. She was in demand on the lecture circuit and the conference circuit and the cooking-demonstration circuit, and she was writing about food for most of the best British papers. But "The Book of Jewish Food" was a singularly daunting project—a history of Jewish life and settlement, told through the story of what Jews ate, and where, and why, and how they made it. Jill Norman—the idea for the book was hers—had urged Roden to sign a contract; Judith Jones, who edited the book, had called it her "logical, natural next step"; and Jane Grigson had been encouraging her to write it. Even so, she was reluctant to take it on, and even more reluctant to finish once she did. It absorbed her for the next sixteen years, and staked a claim on whatever diffidence as a writer she still had. "Sixteen years, and I just couldn't let go," she told me. "My friends thought it would be published posthumously."

Hampstead Garden Suburb is part of a Northwest London cachement where so many Jews have settled over the last century that the government was finally persuaded to turn it into an *eruv*—an area, circled by a string wire, where Orthodox Jews can push a baby carriage or carry keys on the Sabbath, enjoying a state of exemption from their own rules. Roden

END OF SUMMER

Just an uncommon lull in the traffic
so you hear some guy in an apron, sleeves rolled up,
with his *brusque sweep brusque sweep* of the sidewalk,
and the slap shut of a too thin rental van,
and *I told him no* a gust has snatched from a conversation
and brought to you, loud.
It would be so different
if any of these were missing is the feeling
you always have on the first day of autumn,
no, the first day you *think* of autumn, when somehow

the sun singling out high windows,
a waiter settling a billow of white cloth
with glasses and silver, and the sparrows
shattering to nowhere are the Summer
waving that here is where it turns
and will no longer be walking with you,

traveller, who now leave all of this behind,
carrying only what it has made of you.
Already the crowds seem darker and more hurried
and the slang grows stranger and stranger,
and you do not understand what you love,
yet here, rounding a corner in mild sunset,
is the world again, wide-eyed as a child
holding up a toy even you can fix.
How light your step
down the narrowing avenue to the cross streets,
October, small November, barely legible December.

—*James Richardson*

herself is devotedly secular. She says that her parents left Orthodoxy behind when they moved to a mixed Cairo neighborhood and developed a taste for seafood—"I asked my father what he liked best on a night out; he said, 'Prawns and beer'"—and for the ham at Groppi's, the famous old Cairo café. But she is attached to her London neighborhood, in part because so many Middle Easterners work nearby. When she was writing "Middle Eastern Food" and "Arabesque," she could get in her car and in a few minutes be at the Hormuz market, on Finchley Road, shopping for dried Iranian limes and Lebanese rosewater and even *melokhia*, from Egypt. Now, testing recipes for "Jewish Food," she could go to Frohwein's Kosher Butchers, or to the Indian supermarket with a "Jewish floor," or, in an emergency—she swears that she never had one—to one of the halal butchers in the neighborhood. "Well, in Cairo my grandfather once saw the kosher butcher buying from the Muslim butcher" is how she put it. (Either way, it was a trial for Roden, since the meat that Muslims and Orthodox Jews eat, which is ritually drained of blood, loses much of its flavor in the process.) When the subject was fish, she could go to the fishmonger in Golders Green who kept a list of the "forbidden fish"—anything without scales—in his window. She remembers the excitement, in the richer precincts of Northwest London, when a board of rabbis announced the discovery of a vestigial scale on a baby sturgeon, and caviar went on sale.

Two-thirds of the three hundred thousand Jews in Great Britain (and ninety per cent of the world's Jews) are said to trace their origin to Eastern Europe, and it is safe to say that they were never known for the delicacy of their cuisine. Bagels aside, it's hard to think of an Ashkenazi contribution to the British diet. Not even the fish in fish and chips, long attributed to a nineteenth-century Eastern European immigrant (and East End restaurateur) named Joseph Malin, is Ashkenazi. Malin's recipe for deep-fried cod—served with a side of fries, and now consumed by Brits to the tune of two hundred and fifty million orders a year—was in fact carried to England by sixteenth-century Portuguese Marranos, or, you could say, by ur-Sephardic Jews. (According to Thomas Jefferson, who tried it, it was known as "fried fish in the Jewish fashion.") Roden, growing up, had rarely tasted Ashkenazi food, and had since managed to avoid it (most publicly, at a conference in Jerusalem called "Gefilte Fish or Couscous," which included a cook-off between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi guests, and which she describes this way: "None of us went to the Ashkenazi side to taste, but all the Ashkenazi came to ours"). She was not enthusiastic about starting now. "I don't feel British," she told me. "I don't consider myself like one of the Eastern European Jews. We have nothing in common with those Jews. We lived in a Muslim world, they live in a Christian world. They are not me."

There was, of course, no way to write the story of Jewish food without including the food that most Jews in the world once ate, and many still eat. Jill Norman told her to remember that those people knew nothing about Sephardic food—that the contrast was what was interesting. "Little by little, I got interested," Roden says. She told the story of Ashkenazi settlement as it moved eastward from Germany through Poland and into Russia, and then turned back across what Auden once called beer-and-potato-culture Europe, with its joyless, wintery kitchens. And in the process she managed to collect some three hundred surprisingly good Ashkenazi recipes. A few—her Shavuot cheese blintzes; her Hungarian-Jewish goulash—could even be considered worthy of a Sephardic kitchen. And never mind that she failed spectacularly with matzo balls. (She left out the chicken fat and the seltzer, separated the eggs, and then beat the whites, as if she were planning to float *oeufs à la neige* in her chicken soup.) When I asked how she came by such a peculiar recipe—"America," she said—she admitted to having been less than discerning when it came to some of the Ashkenazi dishes, matzo balls being the first, gefilte fish the second, and a cake called *lekach*, which she actually liked, the third. A day later, she said that I shouldn't really count the *lekach*, because the problem had to do with a slip in her metric-to-imperial-cup conversions and she corrected that in the next edition, and, besides, the recipe was

"Am I right in assuming you didn't read our review in the 'Times'?"

"now famous and has won many awards."

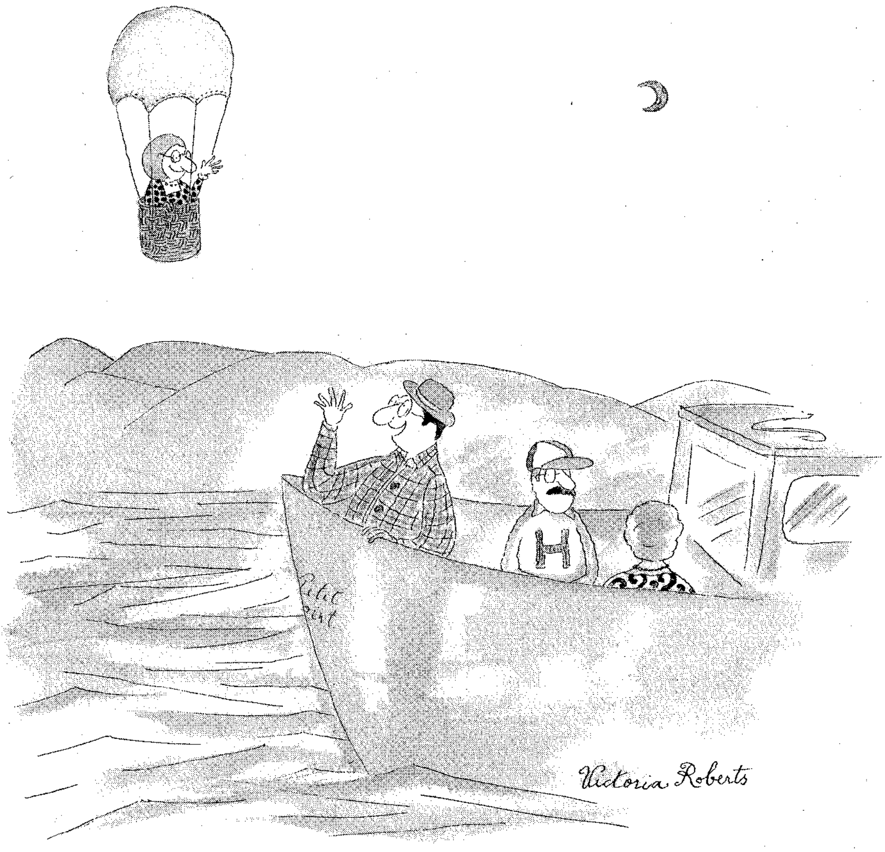
But the heart of her story belongs to the Sephardim. Two-thirds of the recipes are Sephardic—"Just the opposite of the population figures," she likes to say—and they describe a world that once stretched from Spain to China, and now reached westward to the Pacific. (Israeli reviewers called the book "the Sephardic revenge.") Roden says that she worked like a sleuth on the Sephardic chapters. "It was like writing a mystery," she told me. "The Jews of the Sephardic diaspora—well, in those days you couldn't Google and find them. And in a way I'm glad, because it made the work sort of exciting. My parents had had this thing, when they travelled, of looking for Jews. I became like them. My cousin Eric, in Paris"—Eric Rouleau, *Le Monde's* former Middle East correspondent, who was the French ambassador to Tunisia and Turkey during those years—"said, 'Claudia, when are you going to stop looking for Jews?'"

In the end, Roden went to fifteen countries looking for Jews, and nearly as many countries where she wasn't looking but found them anyway. She told me, "It proves that when Jewish people are there, and you meet them, there is always a cuisine." She financed the first of these trips by writing two more cookbooks, in the late eighties; they became best-sellers, to no one's surprise but hers. (The first, "Mediterranean Cookery," grew out of a television series that she was putting together for the BBC. The second, "The Food of Italy," began as a year of region-by-region pieces for the London *Sunday Times Magazine:* "I was in Turin. I was in a hotel, I knew no one. So I opened the phone book and started calling the numbers on the page.") The rest of her trips, which took her through the early nineties, were in large part sponsored by the *Telegraph.* "I was writing a monthly column," as she tells the story. "Whenever I tried to stop, the paper said, 'We'll send you. Go for us, and then take a day or two off and look for Jews.' Which is what I did."

She still talks about the Jews she didn't meet. She missed the Surinam Jews—which is to say their recipe for a Surinamese root vegetable called pom. (She has it now.) She missed the Falasha, from Ethiopia; they lived in Israel by then, but none of them ever showed up when she arranged meetings. And she never got to China, to look for traces of the old Jewish settlement in Kaifeng—"Muslims with blue *kipas,*" the Chinese called them—which in all likelihood had once supplied local agents to the Baghdad branch of her mother's far-flung Sassoon family. (Today, those Jews are indistinguishable from everyone else in Kaifeng, and are said to know nothing about Judaism, let alone about Jewish Chinese food.) But those, arguably, were all she missed.

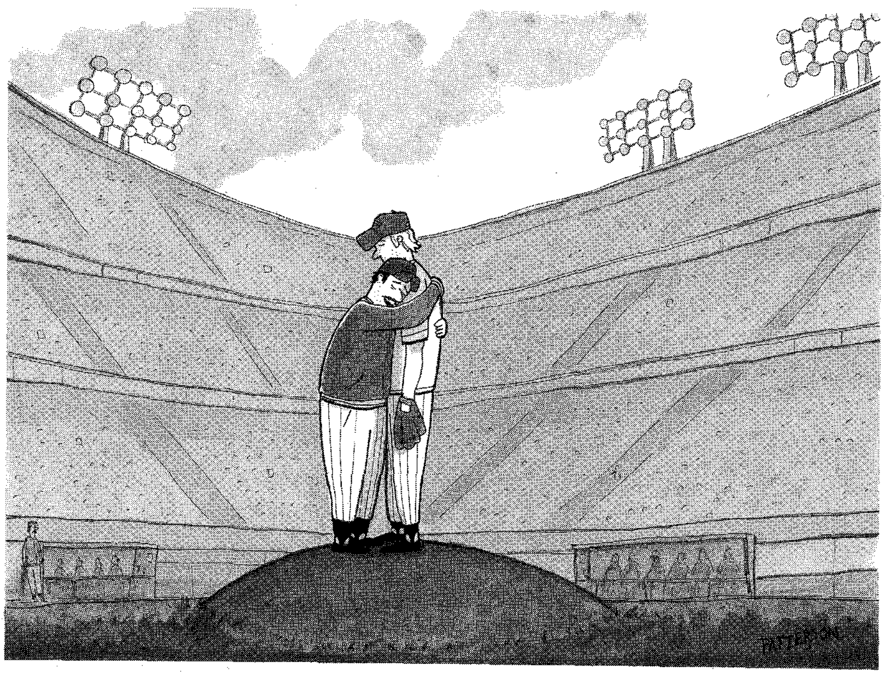
It may have been just as well, because, as she often says, there is no such thing as one Sephardic recipe for anything. There are Sephardic *recipes,* as particular to the places where Jews lived, and the people they lived with, as an Arab couscous from Morocco or Algeria. The Iraqi Jews didn't like the food of the Syrian Jews; they called the Syrians "cows," because they ate too much parsley. The Syrians didn't like the Iraqis' food, because it had too much fat and meat. Then, there were the Iraqis in Iran, who united the Jews of Lebanon and Syria against them by putting beetroot in their *kibbeh.* The Sabbath stew of the Livorno Jews, from Portugal and Spain, was nothing like the stews of the Jews in Rome—or even of the Jews in Venice, many of whom came from Sicily and Turkey. The almond pastries of the Comtat Jews, who had lived in Provence under the protection of the Avignon popes, were nothing like the pastries other Sephardim ate. There were the Izmir Jews, whose food was different from the food of the Istanbul Jews; the Jews of Bombay, whose food was different from the food of their cousins in Calcutta, or Goa or Cochin. And, of course, there were the Jews of Aleppo, like the Doueks, who wouldn't dream of making Damascus dishes, though they ate them happily enough at the parties of Damascene friends in Cairo.

The book is a kind of archive. People look to it for the "authentic" recipes of Jewish settlement, and Roden tends to believe in the idea of authenticity. The *Wall Street Journal Europe* arts and food writer Paul Levy, Roden's co-chairman at the yearly Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, told me, "Claudia is a wonderful cook, but you have to remember that her kitchen is a place of exploration. She's impelled to codify. That's good. It means that she is not distracted by the lack of success of a dish. What is



"We're taking separate vacations this year."

this *supposed* to taste like? That's her most important question. She has that impossible anthropological goal." And her old friend Sami Zubaida, an Iraqi Jew who taught politics and sociology at the University of London for more than thirty years, said, "She is on a hunt for the correct version. Her book is enormously attractive for her empathy, but her argument tends to be that if the Jews ate it then it's authentic Jewish food. Some of the Arabs who read the book were outraged. They thought it was *their* food. They said, 'The food is the same, the difference is in the word for it.'" Nigella Lawson, who is an ardent fan, put it this way: "Things change, products change, and you can have a huge argument about how something should be cooked. When you do an awful lot of research, like Claudia, you have to stand back sometimes and ask, Do I really want to eat this?"



"I love you. We all love you. Now throw some strikes."

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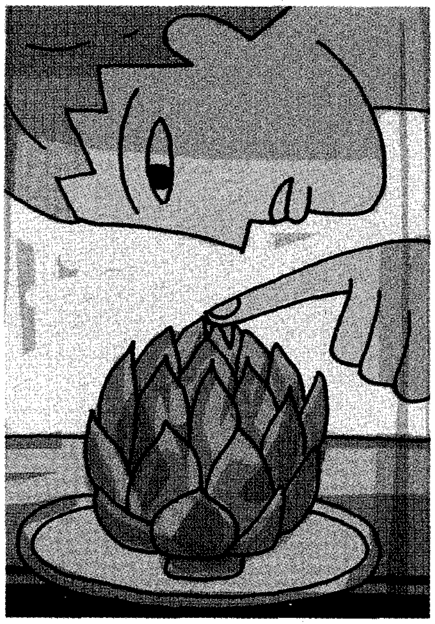
One afternoon in late May, I asked Roden what she meant by "authenticity." It was a day of testing recipes. We were about to leave for Asturias, one of the provinces she had yet to visit for her book on Spanish food, and were sitting at her kitchen table, debating the relative merits of five or six scribbled recipes for a Catalan romesco sauce (a rich purée of almonds, hazelnuts, tomatoes, sweet dried Spanish peppers, garlic, bread, and saffron) while waiting for the beans to cook for an Asturian *fabada* (white beans, chorizos, blood sausages, and saffron) and for the squid to defrost for a Catalan *chipirónes en su tinta con fideos* (squid, vermicelli, onions, garlic, white wine, parsley, and tomatoes). I wanted to know which of the romesco recipes looked to Roden to be the most authentic. They were all from good Catalan cooks, cooks she knew and trusted, and yet they were quite different. One recipe said to use one tomato, another said ten. One recipe said to fry the peppers and garlic, another said not to. In the end, Roden chose the recipe with the most nuts, adjusted it slightly, turned on the food processor, tasted the result, and pronounced it "my best so far." To me, it was perfect. "Most good things just happen," she said. "I don't proceed in a very organized way. I choose what I like, I trust my taste. I tell people, 'Well, what else do you trust but your own taste.'" For Roden, the word "authentic" is very simple: it means that "you can't invent with new ingredients"—unless, like some of the diaspora Jews, new ingredients are all you have. She thinks that cookbook critics (she has had her share) tend to forget that between the "big change" of the fifteen-hundreds, when the produce and animals of the Americas first reached Europe and the Middle East, and the revolution in transportation, travel, and communication of the postwar years, there was very little variation in the food that ordinary people—people rooted in one place—ate, and the way they prepared it.

Roden has been travelling to Spain for the past two and a half years, and one of the things she likes about the country is that the food is still so regional and the culinary history so particular—"a little Visigoth, and then the Moors and the Jews and the clergy and the French, and, of course, the New World, and what the rich took from it, the chocolate, the game, and what the poor took, the vegetables and the beans and the corn." In the food of Andalusia, where the Moors ruled for eight hundred years, you can still taste Spanish Islam. In the food of Aragon and Castile, where the courtiers in Ferdinand's entourage were as often as not Catholic converts, or *conversos*, you can still taste Spanish Judaism. Roden told me that before the Inquisition the Jews in Spain used olive oil for cooking, the Muslims used clarified butter, and the Christians used pork fat. After the expulsion, everyone switched to fat, and the *conversos* hung hams in their houses the way they hung crucifixes and rosaries—conspicuously, fearfully, hoping to convince Inquisitors on the prowl that Spain belonged entirely to Christ. She discovered that Sephardic desserts, like her orange-and-almond cake, had survived in Spanish convents, brought by novices from *converso* families, and that the rice puddings of the Middle East—she has three rice-pudding recipes in "Middle Eastern Food," including one with anise, to which I am addicted—had somehow, over the centuries, made their way to northern Spain, and even to Asturias, which had been effectively cut off from the rest of the country, by the Picos de Europa range, until the nineteen-sixties. She wanted to ask Asturians for their mothers' pudding recipes.

Roden's reputation preceded her to Asturias. We were met at the airport near Oviedo and invited to beautiful restaurants where the rice pudding was "deconstructed" (rice on the bottom, caramel in the middle, and a froth of milk on top) and the lamb chops served in a sauce of baby snails, the young chefs of northern Spain being much under the influence of Ferrán Adrià, the Catalan kitchen impresario who had taken the French idea of

FAMILY DINNER

CHOKE



ANTHONY RUSSO

The place was France, the time was the mid-nineteen-seventies, the evening was warm, and the thing on my plate was trying to kill me. That, at least, was the only sane conclusion at which I could possibly arrive. The thing resembled a dark-green hand grenade, and under the lamp that hung above the dinner table it gleamed and steamed, to my appalled eyes, with the promise of pure malice. I was handed a dish of melted butter, as if to initiate some sacramental rite. "*Merci beaucoup*," I said, although, to be frank, the last thing I needed was a dairy product. I needed the bomb squad.

The Oxford English Dictionary has this to say of the artichoke, or *Cynara scolymus:*

> Its eatable parts are the fleshy bases of the involucral leaves or scales of the gigantic thistle-like flower, and its receptacle or "bottom," when freed from the bristles and seed-down or "choke."

Can you imagine a sentence more likely to dam the salivary glands? For that matter, can you propose a more cogent rebuke to the theory of intelligent design? Surely no wise, all-seeing God would go to the trouble of creating human beings and then encourage them to munch on bristles, bottom, and choke; unless, of course, He was also French, in which case the artichoke would be just the kind of capricious, amusing challenge that He would throw down to mankind—a test of our culinary skills, our table manners, and our powers of mastication.

My meeting with this remarkable vegetable, hitherto glimpsed only on market stalls, came in the midst of an exchange program. Every year, I would pay a visit to my French friend, either at his family's Paris apartment or at their cottage in Normandy, and he in turn would spend a few weeks at my home. Until now, I had been convinced that I had the better deal; at this moment, deep in the Norman pastures, the balance was being hastily redressed. I was already a scrofulous English-speaking teen-ager, barely fit for European society; now, thanks to *Cynara scolymus*, I would also be revealed as an irredeemable hick. Everything—my reputation, my country, my dim hopes for a civilized future—hung on whether I could disarm the hand grenade.

I did the only thing I could. Under the cover of politeness, I waited until Madame began to unpack her own artichoke, and then copied her every tug. No knife, no fork: she merely reached for a spike, as if pulling out the pin, then dunked her involucral leaf in the butter and raised it to her mouth. I followed suit and began to chew, desperately fending off memories of that tense period in the Hundred-Acre Wood when Tigger, seeking a foodstuff that will appeal to his discriminating palate, tries a helping of Eeyore's thistles. The trick with an artichoke is to scrape off, using your upper teeth, the small patch of soft heart at the base of the leaf, and no more. This I did not know. Instead, I overshot, and sat there with bulging cheeks, grinding away at the greenery. My mouth felt like a hedgehog turned inside out, but somehow I made it through. Swallowing was simple by comparison—no harder than ingesting a small hairbrush. "*C'est bon?*" my friend asked, timing his question to perfection. "*Szhmbom*," I replied, trying not to spit sideways at his mother.

Soon my plate was littered with used leaves, revealing the naked heart, or what the compilers of the dictionary referred to as the bottom. This was easy meat—almost comically easy, after the trials posed by its surrounding foliage. These days, when I inspect the jars of sweet, oil-bathed carciofi bottoms in an Italian deli, I am both relieved that such delicacy should be so readily acquired yet also, if I am honest, nagged by a secret disdain for those weak-jawed softies who know nothing but the heart. Like the Prince in "Sleeping Beauty," I once hacked a path through thorn and briar to reach the enchanted castle; and, without the hacking, where is the enchantment? How can you have an artichoke without a choke?

To that extent, the night in Normandy was a success. National honor was upheld. I passed with flying colors and half a tongue. The family smiled and nodded, yet even in their quiet congratulation I caught a gleam of mischief. They realized, as I did not, that an artichoke was but the first, armor-plated step in a lifetime of indoctrination. Ahead lay oysters, and portions of frog, and my first lobster claw, the mastery of which would require long metal instruments apparently borrowed from an obstetrician. Becoming even a little French—sloughing off my former self—would be a process without respite. No wonder my friend, opposite me, was trying not to smirk. The next evening, we were having brains.

—*Anthony Lane*

"creator cuisine" and elaborated on it to the point where you couldn't tell if the foam you were spooning was asparagus or trout. Roden had expected simple food in what is still a largely undiscovered region of green fields and streams running from mountain caves (where the shepherds smoke a sharp local blue cheese called Cabrales) to the fishing villages of the Atlantic coast. She cheerfully ate her way through ten-course *nueva cocina* dinners, but the things she asked about and jotted down in the outsized flowered folder—"Gauguin, from the National Gallery"—that she carried everywhere with her were the best of the local foods: the beans and sausages; the fresh anchovies, marinated in an *escabeche* that could easily have come from Persia; the morning's dorade, baked in white wine, shellfish stock, and a simple *sofrito* of onion, garlic, saffron, and smoked paprika, and finished with a splash of cognac. ("This will go in my book," she said, after her first forkful.)

She has a horror of fusion food, "on principle," though she allowed that nothing she ate in Asturias was quite so "fusion" as the dish called "Egyptian sushi bottarga" that she was served on her last trip to Cairo, in 2003. ("I was giving seminars to Egyptian chefs," she said. "I told them, 'You've got to have *your* food. At the time of the Mamluks, you had three hundred recipes; now you make only four. Don't do fusion. Please!' ") Pepe Iglesias, a local food writer who was Roden's touchstone on the Asturian trip, had told her that there were now twenty-five serious young fusion chefs in Asturias, and after a few days' eating she ventured the opinion that that was perhaps more "creators" than a barely touristed province of a million people needed. ("When I travel now, I'm so used to being looked after," she said later. "I'm used to accepting what happens, but no one can control what I do, or think.") What interested her more was the history of Asturian food. She was curious about the influence of the local monasteries, because Spain's religious orders had been in large part responsible for the development and refinement of traditional Spanish cuisine—much more so than the aristocracy or the upper classes, which had been eating "Bourbon food" since Philip V inherited the Spanish throne, in 1700, and moved from Versailles to Madrid. ("The monasteries were the centers of gastronomy here," she told me. "They had money and land and their own peasants. Some of the great Lenten recipes came from them.") She was curious about the influence of the "Indianos"—poor Asturians who had sailed to the Americas, made fortunes in tobacco, sent their brides to cooking school in Paris, and come home at the turn of the twentieth century with a taste for big painted Mexican villas, Cuban rum, and French crêpes. By then, we had been to Casa Fermín, the great traditional restaurant of Oviedo, eaten its best dishes, and talked recipes with the chef. Now she wanted to talk to ordinary people, who lived from the sea and the land, about what they cooked at home.

On our last night in Spain, we drove into the Picos, to an old farmhouse near a cluster of villages where the family of a forty-year-old Asturian named Jaime Rodriguez has farmed for generations. We had met Rodriguez by chance, coming out of a shop in the town of Cangas de Onís that specialized in Asturian beans, and he had invited us home. For Roden, he was one of the "good things that just happen" when she cooks or travels. He was personable, articulate, intelligent, and, it turned out, an enthusiast of Asturian food, someone who had leaped through centuries, going from "two pigs, some sheep, and a cow" to university in Barcelona and on to a good government job—after which he and his wife had added a wing to their farmhouse and turned the rest into a bed-and-breakfast, where people hiking or fishing in the Picos could stay and, if they were hungry, eat. His mother-in-law made supper for the guests that night: vegetable soup from the garden and a tuna loaf, made with eggs, onions, and red peppers, called *rollo de bonito*, "from the part of the tuna that rich people don't like." While she was cooking, Roden took out her folder, settled into an armchair by the television, turned to Rodriguez, and started asking questions.

"What is the food of the mountains?"

"White beans. Not the biggest, they're too expensive. We eat green beans sometimes, in expensive restaurants, with crab or lobster or langoustines. But for everyday we eat small white beans. My parents grow four kinds. We eat *fabada* all the time."

"How many times a week?"

"At least four times, always with pork, but not necessarily with chorizos. We also eat corn meal, eggs, onions, and bacon."

"When did the corn and beans come?"

"In 1546."

"And are eggs important?"

"Eggs, meat, beans—those are the most important."

"And fresh vegetables?"

"We eat very few fresh vegetables in Asturias. The beans, some peppers, potatoes, and peas. This is a region of meat eaters. The sea is a small slice of it. We eat a lot of game: rabbit, boar, deer, birds, wild goat."

"What else is traditional here?"

"Crêpes, with sugar or honey and apples. And, of course, *sidra*—hard cider."

"How many families make their own cider?"

"In my village, two."

"What are the local tapas?"

"*Croquetas*. Chorizos with *sidra*. Big blood sausages—you boil them, slice them, and then fry them. Pork tripe. Pork cheeks. And fresh bacon, boiled and served with potatoes."

"And for a wedding?"

"Baby goat, and especially lamb. Inside, you fry the lamb with onions and white wine, and then you stew it. Outside, you use burning embers."

"What do you eat for dessert?"

"We have apple cake and flan. The flan is traditional. My mother makes it only with eggs and sugar, not milk."

"And how does she make it?"

"Over a corncob fire. The first layer is caramelized sugar, then she adds the sugar and eggs, and then she covers the lid with charcoal from the corncobs. Every few minutes, she stirs the flan and adds more charcoal."

"Is the flan creamy?"

"No, it's very dense. We eat it a lot—it's very common. For special occasions, we make rice pudding."

"Rice pudding? With anise? With butter and milk?"

"Not with butter. With rice, milk, cinnamon, sugar, lemon rind, and, yes, anise or a little cognac."

"Do you think I could get the recipe?" ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Claudia Roden's orange-and-almond cake and other recipes, plus an interview with Jane Kramer.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE JEFFERSON BOTTLES

How could one collector find so much rare fine wine?

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

The most expensive bottle of wine ever sold at auction was offered at Christie's in London, on December 5, 1985. The bottle was handblown dark-green glass and capped with a nubby seal of thick black wax. It had no label, but etched into the glass in a spindly hand was the year 1787, the word "Lafitte," and the letters "Th.J."

The bottle came from a collection of wine that had reportedly been discovered behind a bricked-up cellar wall in an old building in Paris. The wines bore the names of top vineyards—along with Lafitte (which is now spelled "Lafite"), there were bottles from Châteaux d'Yquem, Mouton, and Margaux—and those initials, "Th.J." According to the catalogue, evidence suggested that the wine had belonged to Thomas Jefferson, and that the bottle at auction could "rightly be considered one of the world's greatest rarities." The level of the wine was "exceptionally high" for such an old bottle—just half an inch below the cork—and the color "remarkably deep for its age." The wine's value was listed as "inestimable."

Before auctioning the wine, Michael Broadbent, the head of Christie's wine department, consulted with the auction house's glass experts, who confirmed that both the bottle and the engraving were in the eighteenth-century French style. Jefferson had served as America's Minister to France between 1785 and the outbreak of the French Revolution, and had developed a fascination with French wine. Upon his return to America, he continued to order large quantities of Bordeaux for himself and for George Washington, and stipulated in one 1790 letter that their respective shipments should be marked with their initials. During his first term as President, Jefferson spent seventy-five hundred dollars—roughly a hundred and twenty thousand dollars in today's currency—on wine, and he is generally regarded as America's first great wine connoisseur. (He may also have been America's first great wine bore. "There was, as usual, a dissertation upon wines," John Quincy Adams noted in his diary after dining with Jefferson in 1807. "Not very edifying.")

In addition to surveying the relevant historical material, Broadbent had sampled two other bottles from the collection. Some nineteenth-century vintages still taste delicious, provided they have been properly stored. But eighteenth-century wine is extremely rare, and it was not clear whether the Th.J. bottles would hold up. Broadbent is a Master of Wine, a professional certification for wine writers, dealers, and sommeliers, which connotes extensive experience with fine wine, and discriminating judgment. He pronounced a 1784 Th.J. Yquem "perfect in every sense: colour, bouquet, taste."

At two-thirty that December afternoon, Broadbent opened the bidding, at ten thousand pounds. Less than two minutes later, his gavel fell. The winning bidder was Christopher Forbes, the son of Malcolm Forbes and a vice-president of the magazine *Forbes*. The final price was a hundred and five thousand pounds—about a hundred and fifty-seven thousand dollars. "It's more fun than the opera glasses Lincoln was holding when he was shot," Forbes declared, adding, "And we have those, too."

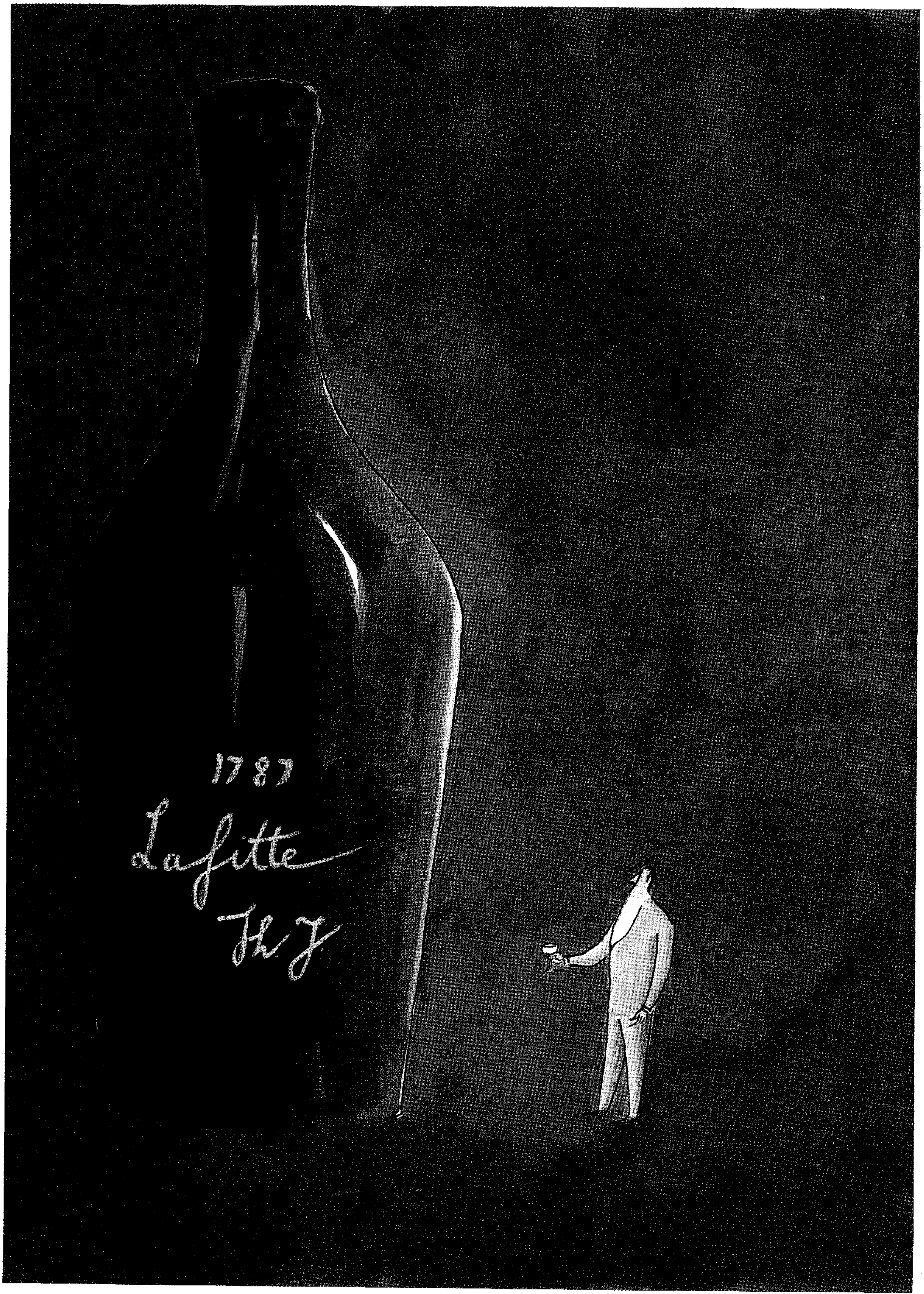
After the auction, other serious collectors sought out Jefferson bottles. The publisher of *Wine Spectator* bought a bottle through Christie's. A mysterious Middle Eastern businessman bought another. And in late 1988 an American tycoon named Bill Koch purchased four bottles. The son of Fred Koch, who founded Koch Industries, he lived in Dover, Massachusetts, and ran his own highly profitable energy company, the Oxbow Corporation. Koch purchased a 1787 Branne Mouton from the Chicago Wine Company in November, 1988. The next month, he bought a 1784 Branne Mouton, a 1784 Lafitte, and a 1787 Lafitte from Farr Vintners, a British retailer. Altogether, Koch spent half a million dollars on the bottles. He installed them in his capacious, climate-controlled wine cellar, and took them out occasionally over the next fifteen years to show them off to friends.

Koch's collection of art and antiques is valued at several hundred million dollars, and in 2005 the Boston Museum of Fine Arts prepared an exhibition of many of his possessions. Koch's staff began tracking down the provenance of the four Jefferson bottles, and found that, apart from Broadbent's authentication of the Forbes bottle, they had nothing on file. Seeking historical corroboration, they approached the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, at Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Several days later, Monticello's curator, Susan Stein, telephoned. "We don't believe those bottles ever belonged to Thomas Jefferson," she said.

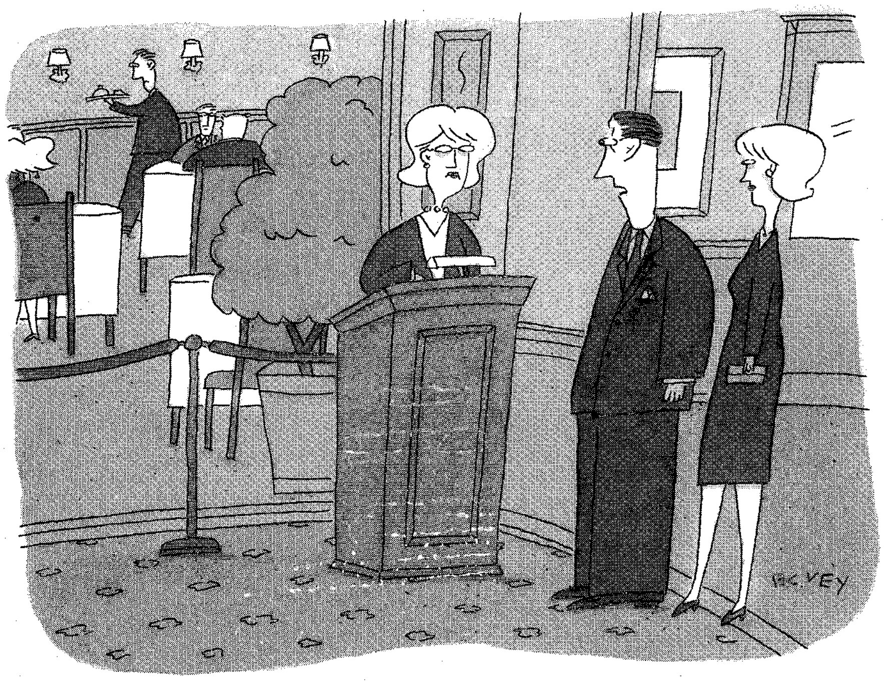
Koch (pronounced "coke") lives with his third wife, Bridget Rooney, and six children, from this and previous marriages, in a thirty-five-thousand-square-foot Anglo-Caribbean-style house in Palm Beach. When I visited him there not long ago, the front lawn had been excavated to extend the house's basement. Koch explained that he needs more storage space. "I'm a bit of a compulsive collector," he said. We strolled past Modigliani's 1917 "Reclining Nude" and Picasso's blue-period "Night Club Singer," a Renoir, a Rodin, and works by Degas, Chagall, Cézanne, Monet, Miró, Dali, Léger, and Botero. Surveillance cameras, encased in little bulbs of black glass, protruded from the ceiling.

"My father was a collector of sorts," Koch said. "I guess I got it from him. He had a small collection of Impressionist art. He collected shotguns. Then he collected ranches." We sat down in Koch's "cowboy room," surrounded by Charles Marion Russell paintings, Frederic Remington bronzes of men on horseback, antique

BENOÎT VAN INNIS


1787
Lafitte
Th. J.

The Christie's catalogue suggested that the wine had belonged to Thomas Jefferson and that its value was "inestimable."



"We succumbed to your hype."

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cowboy hats, bowie knives, and dozens of guns, displayed in glass-topped cases: Jesse James's gun, Jesse James's killer's gun, Sitting Bull's pistol, General Custer's rifle.

Koch, who is sixty-seven, is rangy and tall, with tousled white hair, round spectacles, and a boyish, high-pitched laugh. At M.I.T., where he received his undergraduate degree and a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, he contracted hepatitis, and could no longer stomach hard alcohol. But he could drink wine. At restaurants, he ordered the most expensive wines on the list, and discovered some that he liked. Eventually, he began purchasing wine at auction: first-growth Bordeaux, like Lafite and Latour, and the famous Burgundies of Romanée-Conti. "When I went crazy is when I sold my stock in Koch Industries," he said. That was 1983; he made a reported five hundred and fifty million dollars on the sale. At that point, he decided he would build a world-class wine collection. When I asked why, he looked at me as if I'd failed to grasp the obvious. "Because it's the best-tasting form of alcohol in the world," he said. "That's why."

Koch may be as compulsive about filing lawsuits as he is about collecting. He waged a twenty-year legal battle against two of his brothers relating to the family business. (The matter was settled in 2001.) He sued the state of Massachusetts over an improperly taxed stock transaction and won a forty-six-million-dollar abatement. When a former girlfriend whom he had installed at a condo in Boston's Four Seasons hotel refused to leave, Koch took her to housing court and had her evicted. He talks about "dropping a subpoena" on people as if he were lobbing a grenade.

Fine-wine fraud was almost unheard of when Koch bought his four bottles of Th.J. Bordeaux, and the only assurance he demanded was that they came from the same collection that Broadbent had authenticated. He was angry to find out that Monticello believed his bottles were fake. "I've bought so much art, so many guns, so many other things, that if somebody's out to cheat me I want the son of a bitch to pay for it," he told me, his color rising. "Also," he said, smiling, "it's a fun detective story."

The extraordinary inflation of rare-wine prices—of which the Jefferson bottles are the most conspicuous example—has led in recent years to an explosion of counterfeits in the wine trade. In 2000, Italian authorities confiscated twenty thousand bottles of phony Sassicaia, a sought-after Tuscan red; Chinese counterfeiters have begun peddling fake Lafite. So-called "trophy" wines—best-of-the-century vintages of old Bordeaux—that were difficult to find at auction in the nineteen-seventies and eighties have reëmerged on the market in great numbers. Serena Sutcliffe, the head of Sotheby's international wine department, jokes that more 1945 Mouton was consumed on the fiftieth anniversary of the vintage, in 1995, than was ever produced to begin with. The problem is especially acute in the United States and Asia, Sutcliffe told me, where wealthy enthusiasts build large collections very quickly. "You can go into important cellars and see a million dollars' worth of fakes among five or six million dollars' worth of nice stuff," she said.

Since much of the fine-wine business is conducted in off-the-books "gray market" exchanges between buyers and resellers with no direct link to the château, ascertaining who actually put a particular bottle of wine into circulation can be difficult. But Koch sent emissaries to the Chicago Wine Company and to Farr Vintners, and learned that all four bottles originally came from the person who had supplied the bottle auctioned at Christie's, a flamboyant German wine collector named Hardy Rodenstock.

Rodenstock was a former music publisher who managed German pop acts in the seventies. He maintained residences in Munich, Bordeaux, and Monte Carlo, and was rumored to be part of the wealthy Rodenstock family, which manufactured high-end eyeglasses. He told people that he had started out as a professor, and intimated that he had made a fortune on the stock market.

Rodenstock became interested in wine in the seventies, and developed a passion for the sweet white wine of Château d'Yquem. He especially loved wines that predated the phylloxera epidemic of the late nineteenth century, when a grape-vine pest decimated Europe's vineyards, forcing growers to replant with phylloxera-resistant rootstocks from North America. "In the pre-phylloxera wines of Yquem, you find more flavors, more caramel, more singularity, more power, more class," he once told an interviewer. He boasted to *Wine Spectator* that he had tasted more vintages of old Yquem than the owner of the château had—and the château owner agreed.

Starting in 1980, Rodenstock began holding lavish annual wine tastings, weekend-long affairs attended by wine critics, retailers, and various German dignitaries and celebrities. He opened scores of old and rare wines, all provided at his own expense, and served in custom-made "Rodenstock" glasses that were supplied by his friend the glassmaker Georg Riedel. Impeccably dressed, wearing stylish Rodenstock eyeglasses and shirts with stiff white collars, he bantered with guests, exclaiming, over an especially fine bottle, "*Ja, unglaublich!* One hundred points!" He was punctilious about being on time, barring latecomers, and when serving older wines he banned spitting, which prompted some guests, alarmed at the number of bottles they would be sampling, to hide spittoons in their laps. "You don't spit away history," Rodenstock admonished them. "You drink it."

Rodenstock made no secret of having discovered the Jefferson bottles; on the contrary, the record sale to Forbes had made him a celebrity in the wine world. In the spring of 1985, he would later explain, he received a phone call about an interesting discovery in Paris, where someone had stumbled upon some dusty old bottles, each inscribed with the letters "Th.J." Rodenstock refused to reveal who had sold him the bottles, but apparently the seller did not realize the significance of the initials. "It was like the lottery," Rodenstock said of the experience. "It was simply good luck." He would not say how many bottles there were—in some accounts, it was "a dozen or so," in others, as many as thirty. Nor would he disclose the address in Paris where they were discovered.

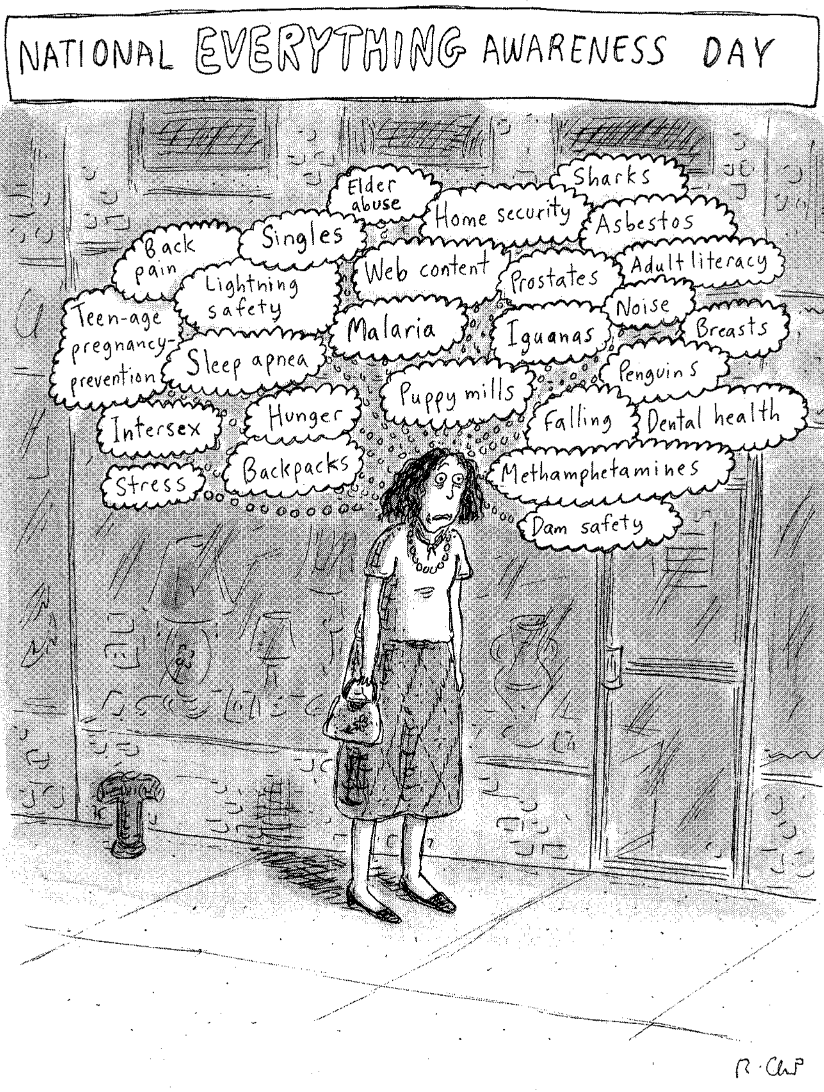
The Jefferson bottles were the first in a series of astonishing finds. Rodenstock became known as an intrepid hunter of the rarest wines. One collector, who was a friend of Rodenstock in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, told me that in 1989 he had arranged a horizontal tasting of bottles of 1929 wines from many different châteaux. The one bottle he had been unable to find was a 1929 Château Ausone. Several days before the tasting, he received a telephone call from Rodenstock. "I'm in Scotland," Rodenstock announced. "I found a bottle of Ausone '29!" Rodenstock travelled to Venezuela, where, according to press reports, he found a hundred cases of Bordeaux; in Russia, he uncovered "the tsar's lost cache" of nineteenth-century wine. At Munich's Hotel Königshof in 1998, he held a vertical tasting of a hundred and twenty-five years' worth of Yquem, including two bottles from the Jefferson collection. "Amazingly, they didn't taste over the hill or oxidized," *Wine Spectator's* correspondent remarked. "The 1784 tasted as if it were decades younger."

Some members of the wine press avoided the events. The critic Robert Parker attended only one tasting; he told me that the extravagance of the affairs kept him away. Rating the selections would be of little use to most of his readers, he said, because they could hardly find, much less afford, such wines. And the policy against spitting, combined with Rodenstock's tendency to withhold the most exciting offerings until the end of a tasting, could seriously impair any objective assessment of the wine. "He always seemed to serve the great stuff after you were primed pretty good," Parker said of the one event he did attend, a 1995 tasting in Munich. "People were getting shitfaced."

Even so, Parker was amazed at some of Rodenstock's wines. "Out of this universe!" he wrote of a large-format magnum of Pétrus from 1921 that Rodenstock served. "This huge, unbelievably concentrated wine could have been mistaken for the 1950 or 1947." In his journal, *The Wine Advocate*, Parker deemed the three-day tasting "the wine event of my lifetime." "I quickly learned," he wrote, "that when Hardy Rodenstock referred to a '59 or a '47, I needed to verify whether he was talking about the nineteenth or the twentieth century!"

Michael Broadbent regularly attended Rodenstock events. In his book "Vintage Wine: Fifty Years of Tasting Three Centuries of Wines," Broadbent acknowledges that it was through Rodenstock's "immense generosity" that he was able to taste many of the rarest entries. Much of his section on eighteenth-century wines consists of notes from Rodenstock tastings.

Bill Koch was never invited to one of these tastings, but he had heard of Rodenstock, and the two had met on one oc-



casion, in 2000, when Christie's held a tasting of Latour in its offices in New York. According to Koch, Rodenstock arrived late, and Koch approached him. "Hi, I'm Bill Koch," he said. "I bought some wine from you."

Rodenstock shook Koch's hand. He looked uncomfortable, Koch thought. "So you're the famous collector," Rodenstock said, before hastily walking away.

In legal disputes, Koch has occasionally relied on the services of a tenacious retired F.B.I. agent named Jim Elroy. During his law-enforcement career, Elroy worked on many fraud investigations, and when questions about the Jefferson bottles arose he told Koch, "If you want your money back, I'll get it."

That wasn't enough for Koch. "I want to lock him up," he told Elroy. "Saddle up." (Koch's enthusiasm for cowboy culture has rubbed off on Elroy. He describes his boss as "the new sheriff in town"; his cell-phone ring tone is the whistled theme from "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.")

Elroy is in his sixties and has a weathered, tanned face and a conspiratorial smile. He's a bit of a raconteur, and when we met for lunch recently he related the details of his investigation in the studied cadences of someone who had told the story before. "Cases either get better or they get worse," he told me. "This one just kept getting better." From the beginning, Koch was interested in suing Rodenstock, Elroy explained, but he also wanted Elroy to prepare a criminal case against him which could ultimately be handed to federal authorities. Elroy was invigorated by Koch's ambitions. "This investigation has all the earmarks of an F.B.I. investigation," he told me. "Only with the best people in the world available instantly. And with none of the bureaucracy." He estimated that since 2005 Koch has spent more than a million dollars on the Rodenstock case—twice what he paid for the wine.

As Elroy and his team—a former Scotland Yard inspector in England, a former MI5 agent in Germany, and several wine experts in Europe and the United States—began their investigation, in 2005, they learned from the staff at Monticello that doubts about the authenticity of the Jefferson wines date back to the auction of the original bottle. Broadbent had approached Monticello in the fall of 1985, to inquire about references to wine in some of Jefferson's letters. A researcher named Cinder Goodwin, who had spent fifteen years studying Jefferson's voluminous papers, responded to Broadbent that November, expressing skepticism. "Jefferson's daily account book, virtually all of his letters, his banker's statements, and miscellaneous internal French customs forms survive for this period and mention no 1787 vintages," she wrote. When a reporter from the *Times* reached Goodwin, before the auction, to ask about the connection, she noted that whereas the initials on Rodenstock's bottles were written "Th.J.," in his correspondence Jefferson tended to use a colon—"Th:J."

CHINA RO
WILL WORK FOR FOOD NETWORK
Shanahan

Broadbent did not mention these doubts in the catalogue, and the *Times* story did not dissuade the bidders. (In an article published in this magazine at the time, Broadbent told a reporter that he found "no proof" but plenty of circumstantial evidence—"masses of it"—that Jefferson had owned the bottle.) Shortly after the auction, Goodwin prepared a research report on the bottles, in which she concluded that although they could very well be authentically eighteenth century, the specific connection with Jefferson was not borne out by the historical record. She was at pains to insist that she was not questioning the good faith of Rodenstock or Broadbent, but she wondered, "Were there not Thomases, Theodores, or Theophiles, and Jacksons, Joneses, and Juliens who also had a taste for fine Bordeaux wine, and who would have been resident in Paris?" She pointed out that historical records document the inhabitants at various addresses in Paris. If Rodenstock would reveal the address where he discovered the wine, "a proper connection might be made."

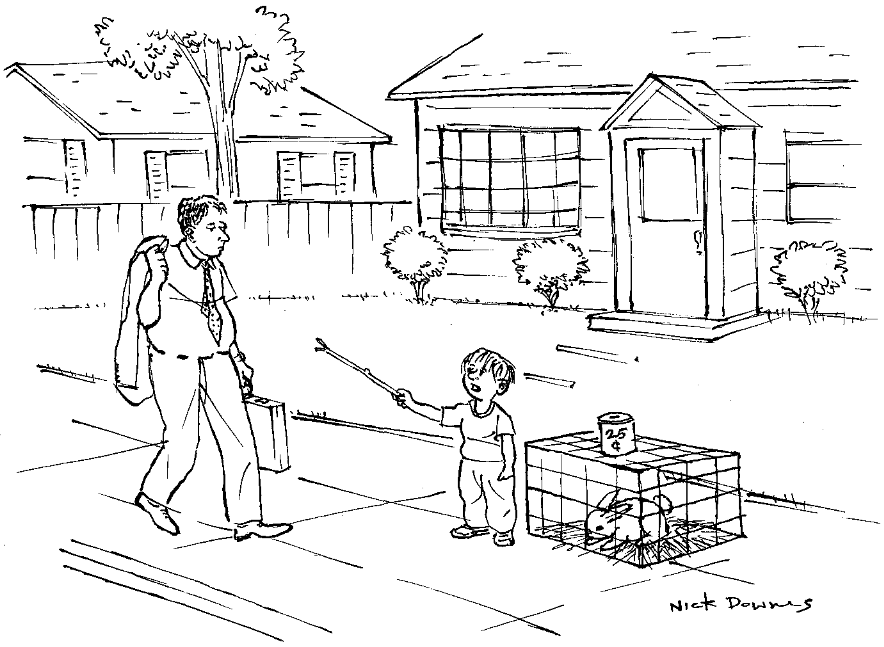
Soon a flurry of letters from Rodenstock began arriving at Monticello. Though he speaks passable English, the letters were in German; a Monticello tour guide translated them. On December 28, 1985, Rodenstock wrote, referring to Goodwin, that "one should courteously keep back one's dubious and unfounded remarks and one shouldn't make oneself important in front of the press." Dan Jordan, Monticello's executive director, wrote back, protesting that Goodwin was a highly regarded Jefferson scholar, and that, unlike Rodenstock or Christie's, she had no financial interest in the determination of authenticity.

"Can you study 'Jefferson' at university?" Rodenstock replied. "She doesn't know anything about wine in connection with Jefferson, doesn't know what bottles from the time frame 1780-1800 look like, doesn't know how they taste."

Broadbent wrote letters to Monticello as well, standing by Rodenstock and the bottles. Some unbridgeable philosophical gap seemed to separate the historians in Virginia and the connoisseurs in Europe. Broadbent, like Rodenstock, expressed confidence that the sensory experience of consuming a bottle of wine trumped historical evidence. In June, 1986, he noted that he had just tasted a bottle of Rodenstock's 1787 Th.J. Branne Mouton. The wine was "sensationally good," Broadbent wrote. "If anyone had any lingering doubts about the authenticity of this extraordinary old wine, they were completely removed. . . . Admittedly, there is no written evidence that these particular bottles had been in the possession of Jefferson, but I am now firmly convinced that this indeed was the wine that Jefferson ordered."

It wasn't only the researchers at Monticello who raised doubts about the wine. Before Christie's auctioned the bottle to Forbes, Rodenstock had offered a bottle of the Th.J. Lafitte to a German collector named Hans-Peter Frericks, for around ten thousand Deutsche marks. After Forbes spent forty times that sum, Frericks decided to auction his own bottle and approached Broadbent. But Rodenstock intervened, saying that he had sold the bottle to Frericks on the condition that Frericks not resell it. (Frericks denies that such a condition existed.) Frericks turned to Sotheby's, but, after examining the evidence, the auction house declined, citing the bottle's uncertain provenance.

Rodenstock's efforts to stop the sale, along with Sotheby's doubts about the bottle, made Frericks suspicious, and in 1991 he sent the bottle to a Munich lab to have its contents carbon-dated. All organic material contains the radioactive isotope carbon 14, which exhibits a predictable rate of decay; scientists can thus analyze the amount of the isotope in a bottle of wine in order to approximate its age. Carbon 14 has a long half-life, and carbon dating is relatively imprecise for evaluating objects that are several centuries old. But nuclear atmospheric tests in the nineteen-fifties and sixties offer a benchmark of sorts, since levels of carbon 14 rise sharply during that period. In this case, the amounts of carbon 14 and of another isotope, tritium, were much higher than one would expect for two-hundred-year-old wine, and the scientists concluded that the bottle contained a mixture of wines, nearly half of which dated to 1962 or later. Frericks sued Rodenstock, and, in December, 1992, a German court found in his favor, holding that Rodenstock "adulterated the wine or knowingly offered adulterated wine." (Rodenstock appealed, and sued Frericks for defamation. The matter was ultimately settled out of court.)



"Poke my bunny with a stick, sir?"

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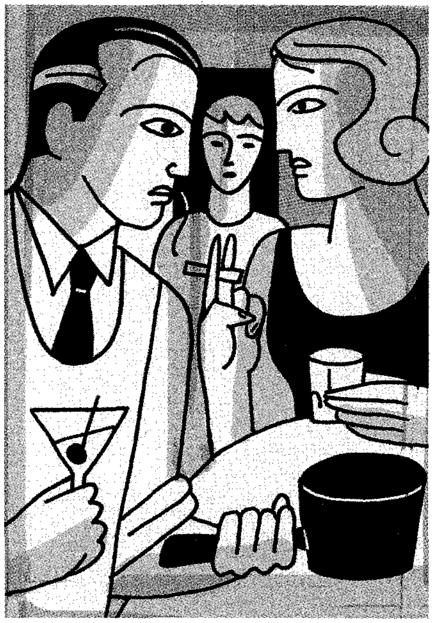
In addition to the former MI5 agent, the indefatigable Elroy employed two private investigators in Germany, who discovered that Hardy Rodenstock was a fictitious name. The investigators visited Rodenstock's home town, Marienwerder, in what is now Poland. They reported to Koch that Rodenstock had started out as Meinhard Goerke, the son of a local railroad official. They interviewed Rodenstock's mother and visited his elementary school. The investigators told Koch that Rodenstock had trained as an engineer and taken a job with German Federal Railways; they could find no evidence to support his claims of being a professor. They also interviewed Tina York, a German pop singer with whom Rodenstock was romantically involved in the seventies and eighties. York told them that during her decade-long relationship with Rodenstock he hid the fact that he had two sons from an earlier marriage. "He always talked about two nephews," she said.

Rodenstock had adopted his new identity at about the time he met York, the investigators said, and told her that he was part of the famous Rodenstock family. It was while he was with York that he first became interested in wine. She didn't share his devotion to the hobby. She remembered placing a bowl of potato salad in his air-conditioned wine cellar one day, to keep it cool. "Rodenstock just flipped out," she said.

Rodenstock was known for his discerning nose and his ability to identify wines in blind tastings. Elroy wondered whether he might possess the skills of a mixer, the type of expert that vineyards employ to achieve a precise blend of grapes. There are no scientific tests that can reliably determine the grape varietals in a bottle of wine, and Elroy speculated that Rodenstock might have concocted forgeries by mixing various wines—and even a dash of port, as forgers have been known to do—in order to create a cocktail that tasted like the real thing. Pursuing these suspicions, Elroy's team of investigators asked several people they interviewed whether they had any recollection of Rodenstock's having a laboratory where counterfeits could be made. Then, last October, a German named Andreas Klein approached Koch's team and said that Rodenstock had lived for several years in an apartment owned by his family. The two had quarrelled over Klein's desire to add an apartment above Rodenstock's, and ended up in court. In 2004, after Rodenstock abandoned the apartment, Klein entered his former tenant's cellar and discovered a collection of empty bottles and a stack

FAMILY DINNER

A MAN IN THE KITCHEN



ANTHONY RUSSO

When I was a boy, it was said in my family that my mother, an otherwise respectable cook, had prepared for my father, during the first days of their marriage, a very bad dish. The dish was a hot tuna-and-mayonnaise casserole with potato chips as a decorative garnish. It was this tuna casserole that had, as it were, driven my father to teach himself to cook. Over time, the story of the tuna casserole took on the status and weight of Received History; it became my father's explanation and alibi—"Baked mayonnaise! I had to take action!"—for his dominion over our kitchen. Looking back, I can see that the story also functioned as an origin narrative; it united us—my mother, my father, my sister, and me—in lighthearted understanding of the triumph of bluegrass gentility over whatever in our natures could be seen as vulgar and Appalachian. (My father's people were from Virginia, my mother's from East Tennessee.)

By the late nineteen-sixties, when we were living on a farm outside Charlottesville, cooking had almost become my father's second occupation, after teaching literature at the University of Virginia. On weekday afternoons, he left his campus office and, before coming home, drove his rounds between markets and shops. On Saturdays, an all-day shopping trip might take place. After we moved to Miami, in 1970, my sister began to accompany him on grocery missions that took them from one district to another: fish and meat were in Coral Gables; wine was in Coconut Grove; and then it was off to South Miami for olive oil, tomatoes, and chocolate for a mousse. My father was an early adopter of the Cuisinart, and an early convert to homemade pasta; the backs of chairs in our house could often be found draped with waxed paper and drying fettuccine.

In the evening, while working in the kitchen, my father drank Martinis. On weekdays at around seven, my mother would return from her job teaching fashion history and costume design at Miami-Dade Community College; her first actions were always to light a cigarette and pick up the bourbon bottle that sat on the kitchen counter. The brief spells of tranquillity that followed the first swallows of her first drink gave way, most nights, to frightening tirades. The fights were often triggered by some aspect of dinner itself, frequently its presentation—something that my father, a student of the magazine *Gourmet,* with its high-gloss photographs and illustrations, cared about. "Why does everything always have to be served in these *little dishes*?" my mother might cry as he set the table with condiments in bowls. If her rage kicked in before we sat down, dinner would be delayed. My father would pace between the kitchen and the dining room, under siege, while, in the oven, under low heat, the night's meal dried up and turned brown.

Cooking was his refuge. Insofar as it constituted avoidance—the nightly project as grandiose distraction—it was also, as I saw it then, an act of contrition, maybe a symbolic one, for his inability to give my mother a better life, a life in which she and he and my sister and I might not be so utterly ruled by her illness. Now I realize that this gesture often lost its meaning and became, instead, a perpetually restated reminder of the broadening gulf between my mother and the rest of us, as, month by month and year after year, she slipped into a state in which food became unappetizing, then unpalatable, and, finally, unwanted. In 1982, shortly after her first hospitalizations for alcoholism, my parents' marriage broke apart.

I saw my father not long ago. He had remarried two decades earlier, and during that time—in which my mother had passed away—he and I had not been close. He had lived off and on in Florence, and had tried many times to persuade me to visit, but I had always refused. For years, I had held against him his abandonment, as I saw it, of my mother. But this past winter, I finally took him up on the invitation, and for a week he showed me Florence. On our last night together, we ate at a restaurant where he was greeted as *Professore.* Sitting in that little restaurant by the Arno, listening to him tell me about the life he had made with my stepmother, I could feel the old hatred fading away.

My father ordered the *lardo*—basically, a plate of seasoned fat—to start. This, I thought, was one of his classic *Gourmet*-style showoff moves. "Here, try," he said when the food arrived, and I tasted the thinly sliced, salty white lard. There we were, my father and I, two men who had lost the same woman. "Wow," I said after taking one bite, then two, then three.

"Good?" he asked.

"It is," I said. "Yes. Who knew?"

—Donald Antrim

of apparently new wine labels. In response to these claims, Rodenstock has initiated legal proceedings against Klein.

There are two types of wine counterfeiters: those who do not tamper with what is inside the bottle and those who do. Because the price of a great vintage of fine wine often dwarfs the price of an indifferent one, many forgers will start with a genuine bottle of, say, 1980 Pétrus and simply replace the label with one from 1982. (The '82 vintage is especially coveted and expensive.) With a good scanner and a color printer, labels are easy to replicate—one former auctioneer I spoke with called it "desktop publishing." The cork in the bottle is marked with the year, but forgers sometimes scratch away the last digit, assuming that the buyer won't notice. Moreover, because corks tend to deteriorate after decades in the bottle, some vineyards offer a recorking service, so a bottle with a newer cork might not immediately arouse suspicion. In any event, the cork is generally concealed by the foil capsule until the buyer opens the bottle.

The forger's greatest advantage is that many buyers wait years before opening their fraudulent bottles, if they open them at all. Bill Koch told me that he owns wine that he has no intention of ever drinking. He collects bottles from certain vineyards almost as if they were baseball cards, aiming to complete a set. "I just want a hundred and fifty years of Lafite on the wall," he said. He would hesitate before consuming the harder-to-come-by vintages, because to do so would render the set incomplete, and also because the rarest old wines often come not from the best vintages but from the worst. Historically, when good vintages were produced, collectors would lay them down to see how they would age, Koch explained. But when renowned vineyards produced mediocre vintages people would drink them soon after they were bottled, making the vintage scarce. When I wondered why he would buy old wines that he never intended to drink, Koch shrugged. "I'm never going to shoot Custer's rifle," he said.

The second great advantage for wine forgers is that when collectors do open fraudulent bottles they often lack the experience and acute sense of taste to know that they have been defrauded. To begin with, even genuine old wines vary enormously from bottle to bottle. "It's a living organism," Sotheby's Serena Sutcliffe told me. "It moves, it changes, it evolves—and once you're into wines that are forty, fifty, sixty years old, even if the bottles are stored side by side in similar conditions, you will get big differences between bottles."

Studies suggest that the experience of smelling and tasting wine is extremely susceptible to interference from the cognitive parts of the brain. Several years ago, Frédéric Brochet, a Ph.D. student in oenology at the University of Bordeaux, did a study in which he served fifty-seven participants a midrange red Bordeaux from a bottle with a label indicating that it was a modest *vin de table*. A week later, he served the same wine to the same subjects but this time poured from a bottle indicating that the wine was a grand cru. Whereas the tasters found the wine from the first bottle "simple," "unbalanced," and "weak," they found the wine from the second "complex," "balanced," and "full." Brochet argues that our "perceptive expectation" arising from the label often governs our experience of a wine, overriding our actual sensory response to whatever is in the bottle.

Thus there is a bolder kind of forger who actually substitutes one type of wine for another. He often works with genuine bottles bearing genuine labels, obtaining empties from restaurants or antique shops, filling them with another type—or types—of wine, and replacing the cork and the capsule, assuming that the status-conscious buyer will never taste the difference. And, in many cases, this assumption is right. Sutcliffe believes that the vast majority of fake wines are happily enjoyed. Rajat Parr, a prominent wine director who oversees restaurants in Las Vegas, told me that several years ago some of his customers ordered a bottle of 1982 Pétrus, which can sell in restaurants for as much as six thousand dollars. The party finished the bottle and ordered a second. But the second bottle tasted noticeably different, so they sent it back. The staff apologetically produced a third bottle, which the diners consumed with pleasure. Parr closely examined the three bottles and discovered the problem with the second one: it was genuine.

If the Th.J. bottles were counterfeit, the question facing Jim Elroy was whether someone else's genuine eighteenth-century bottles had been passed off as Thomas Jefferson's or whether the wine had actually been adulterated. The fact that Broadbent and other connoisseurs had tasted several Jefferson bottles and declared them authentic seemed to suggest that the wine in the bottles was the real thing. Jancis Robinson, another Master of Wine and the wine columnist for the *Financial Times*, had attended the 1998 Yquem tasting, and found the two Th.J. bottles "convincingly old," slightly moldy initially, but then, as "the miracle of great old wine began to work," opening up, with the 1784 giving off a "feminine fragrance of roses" and the 1787 "autumnal aromas of burnt sugar and undergrowth."

But Brochet told me that, in tastings, experts are more susceptible than average drinkers to interference from their own experience and presumptions. And these endorsements seem to be disputed by the scientific test commissioned by Hans-Peter Frericks, which found that nearly half of the wine in his 1787 Lafitte dated to sometime after 1962. Following Frericks's test, Rodenstock had commissioned his own, on another bottle of 1787 Lafitte, from Dr. Georges Bonani, a Zurich scientist. Bonani carbon-dated the wine and determined that no wine in the bottle dated to 1962 or later, thus contradicting the specific finding of Frericks's study. Rodenstock frequently referred to Bonani's results as "conclusive" in their authentication of the bottle. But it seems difficult to consider any of these tests truly conclusive. For one thing, the different tests were conducted on different bottles, and it seems rash to extrapolate from the results of one bottle anything about the authenticity of the others. Further, carbon dating can't provide a reliable determination of the age of wines bottled during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and an examination of Bonani's lab report reveals that his findings reflected a considerable margin of error. While the test might have ruled out the presence of late-twentieth-century wine, it did not provide absolute proof that the wine dated to 1787. "The test says only that the wine is from somewhere between 1673 and 1945," Bonani wrote in a recent e-mail.

Skeptical of both parties' tests, Elroy sought out Philippe Hubert, a French physicist who had devised a method of testing the age of wine without opening the bottle. Hubert uses low-frequency gamma rays to detect the presence of the

GHOST ELEPHANTS

In the elephant field
tall green ghost elephants
with your cargo of summer leaves

at night I heard you breathing at the window

Don't you ever think I'm not crying
since you're away from me
Don't ever think I went free

At first the goodbye had a lilt to it—
maybe just a couple of months—
but it was a beheading.

Ghost elephant,
my lost mother,
reach down,
cross me over—

—*Jean Valentine*

radioactive isotope cesium 137. Unlike carbon 14, cesium 137 is not naturally occurring; it is a direct result of nuclear fallout. A wine bottled before the advent of atmospheric nuclear testing contains no cesium 137, so the test yields no results for older wines. But if a wine does contain cesium 137 the short half-life of the isotope—thirty years—allows Hubert to make a more precise estimate of its age.

Elroy flew to France, with the Jefferson bottles packed in two bulletproof, impact-resistant cases, which he carried as hand luggage. (He had obtained a *carnet*, a sort of passport for objects, so that he would not have to pay any duties while crossing borders with a half million dollars' worth of wine. When airport security scrutinized the bottles between flights at Heathrow, Elroy deadpanned, "You just can't get a good bottle of wine on the airplane.")

The lab where Hubert and Elroy tested the wine is under a mile-high stretch of the Alps on the French-Italian border. The bottles were placed into a detector that was surrounded by ten inches of lead and were subjected to a week of tests.

Elroy was confident by now that he and his investigators were closing in on Rodenstock. "With the evidence I'm seeing from Monticello, combined with what I'm seeing from Germany, I'm ninety-nine-per-cent sure this guy is a fraud," he recalled. When Hubert completed the tests, however, he identified no cesium 137 in the bottles. "I don't know whether it's 1783 or 1943," Hubert told Elroy. But the wine predated the atomic age.

"I can't tell you how disappointing it was," Elroy told me. "I've got the historical evidence, but if we're going to do this criminally there's got to be more than that. I've got to have some kind of scientific or other evidence, or it's not going to be prosecutable."

On the plane back to the United States, Elroy took one of the bottles down and held it in his hands. "I'm looking at the capsule and the glass itself," he said. "I run my hand over the engraving. I can feel it. And then I think, This is a tool mark. This was done with a tool."

When Elroy landed, he called the F.B.I.'s laboratory, in Quantico, Virginia. The lab's ballistics experts specialize in tool-mark examinations, noting the telltale impression that a gun barrel leaves on a bullet, or a screwdriver makes when it pries open a window. The lab gave Elroy the names of some recently retired specialists. He also visited the Corning Museum of Glass, in upstate New York, where he was referred to an expert glass engraver, Max Erlacher, an Austrian-born craftsman who had done work for a number of American Presidents.

Several weeks later, Elroy hired Erlacher and a retired F.B.I. tool expert named Bill Albrecht to examine the bottles at Bill Koch's estate in Palm Beach. Elroy wanted to know whether the writing on the bottles had been done with a copper wheel, the sort of tool used in the eighteenth century to engrave glass. In Jefferson's time, the copper wheel, usually operated by a foot pedal, spun in a stationary position, and the engraver moved the bottle around it.

Erlacher and Albrecht inspected the bottles, examining the ridges of the engraving under a powerful magnifying glass. Letters engraved by a copper wheel tend to vary in thickness, like the strokes of a fountain pen. But the lettering on the bottles was strangely uniform, and it slanted in a way that a copper-wheel engraving would not. The initials could not have been made in the eighteenth century, Erlacher concluded. Instead, they looked as if they might have been done with a handheld tool like a dentist's drill or a Dremel—a tool powered by electricity. This was "a quantum leap," Elroy thought. As it happened, he had a Dremel tool at home. "I get a bottle of wine, and I screw with it," he recalled. "And in an hour I can engrave 'Th.J.' "

On August 31, 2006, Bill Koch filed a civil complaint against Rodenstock ("a.k.a. Meinhard Goerke") in New York federal court. Although it was the Chicago Wine Company and Farr Vintners that had sold Koch the wines, the complaint alleged that Rodenstock had orchestrated an "ongoing scheme" to defraud wine collectors. "Rodenstock is charming and debonair," the complaint read. "He is also a con artist."

Before filing the suit, Koch's lawyers were interested to see whether Rodenstock would acknowledge a personal connection to Koch's Jefferson bottles (given that Koch had not bought them directly from him), and whether he might effectively continue the alleged fraud by still insisting that they were real. So Koch faxed Rodenstock a cordial letter, in January, 2006, saying that he was trying to authenticate his Jefferson wines, and asking Rodenstock to send a letter indicating that he had "every reason to believe" that the bottles "once belonged to Thomas Jefferson." Rodenstock replied on January 10th, saying, "The Jefferson bottles are absolutely genuine and . . . come from a walled up cellar in Paris.” He pointed out that Christie’s had vouched for the bottles’ authenticity, and enclosed a copy of Bonani’s report. “You will surely understand that the discussions on the genuineness of the Jefferson bottles [are] herewith closed for me,” he wrote.

In April, Koch wrote to Rodenstock again, asking whether the two could meet, “over a good glass of wine, at a place of your choosing,” to discuss some of his concerns about the bottles. Rodenstock declined. “From a legal point of view the purchase and the sale are barred by the statute of limitations,” he wrote. The person who sold him the bottles in 1985 was in his sixties at the time, he continued, and might no longer be alive. Questions about the bottles’ authenticity were “grist for the mill of the yellow press.” When the suit was filed, Rodenstock moved to dismiss it.

Koch’s lawyers flew to London in October to interview Michael Broadbent, who was by then seventy-nine years old but still active on the international wine circuit. Broadbent said he had asked Rodenstock “over and over again” to divulge the address where the bottles were found. But he continued to maintain that the Jefferson bottles were real.

In a way, Broadbent had little choice. He had based hundreds of tasting notes in his books and auction catalogues on wines supplied by Hardy Rodenstock. The notion that twentieth-century connoisseurs could testify to what an eighteenth-century wine tastes like depended on the integrity of Rodenstock, one of the primary suppliers of those wines. If Rodenstock was exposed as a fraud, the credibility of Broadbent, who had repeatedly certified Rodenstock’s findings, would suffer a considerable blow. When asked why he had not done more research into the Th.J. Lafitte before the auction, he replied, “We are auctioneers; we are like journalists on deadlines. I did not have the time.” The lawyers asked whether Christie’s had prepared any written evidence back in 1985 to buttress the wine department’s claims about the bottles. Broadbent responded that it never occurred to him to put anything in writing. “With Christie’s we are all perfect gentlemen,” he said.

Last fall, Richard Brierley, the head of Christie’s wine sales in the United States, told John Wilke, at the *Wall Street Journal*, that while he wasn’t involved in the 1985 authentication of the Jefferson bottles, “looking back, more questions could have been asked.” (Christie’s contends that Brierley was quoted out of context.) Hugo Morley-Fletcher, who, in 1985, was the head of Christie’s ceramics department and was one of the glass experts Broadbent consulted about the authenticity of the Forbes bottle, told me, “My opinion at that time, within my experience, was that it was correct. . . . The trouble is we are engaged in an activity which is not a precise science.” He explained that he had judged that the bottle dated to the eighteenth century, and that the engraving dated to the same period. When I asked whether there was any possibility that he could have been mistaken about the engraving, he replied, “Of course,” and added, “One has to come up with an opinion. It is possible that one was conned.” Despite numerous attempts, I was unable to reach Michael Broadbent, but a Christie’s spokesman told me that “Mr. Broadbent’s decision to go forward with the sale represented his considered opinion based on all of the facts available to him at that time—a decision that we would not speculate upon twenty-two years later.”

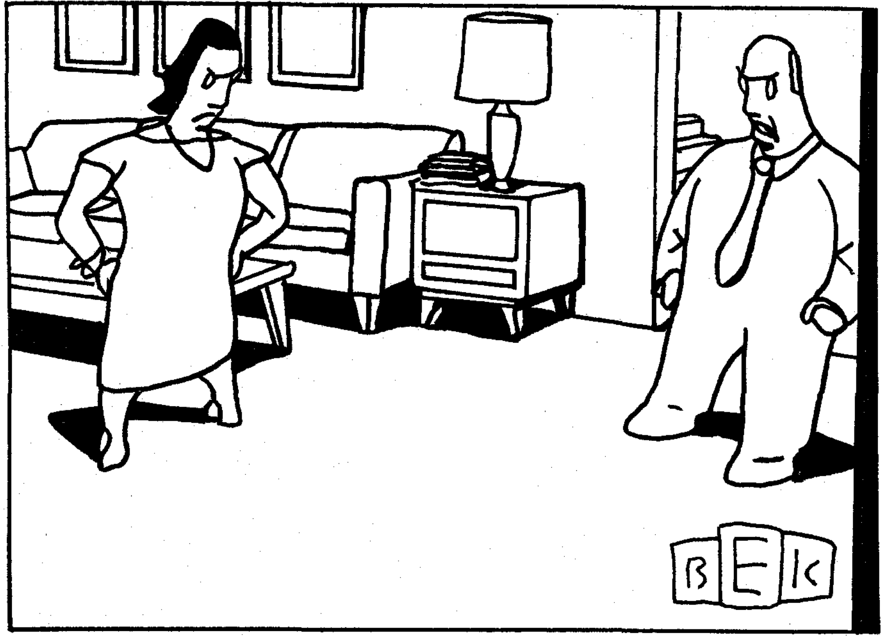
Still, Christie’s fine-and-rare-wine auction in New York in December, 2006, featured a 1934 Pétrus accompanied by a description, taken from Broadbent’s book, of a 1934 Pétrus imperial that he had tasted years earlier. “Where Hardy Rodenstock finds these wines I know not,” it read. “There are simply no records of production, of stock or sales prior to 1945. All I can say is that the big bottle was delicious.” Koch did not know whether Rodenstock had consigned the bottle (Christie’s told me he had not). But he was angry that even in the face of the allegations in his suit the auction house would promote wine with Broadbent notes on Rodenstock bottles. He telephoned the auction house to complain, but Christie’s proceeded with the auction. The wine was offered at twenty-two hundred dollars. It went unsold.

No one knows how many bottles of wine—real or fake—Hardy Rodenstock has sold over the years. His deals were often in cash. (“If you pay in cash, then people don’t have to declare the sale for tax purposes,” he once told an interviewer. “Two hundred thousand dollars in cash can sometimes be better than a million-dollar check.”) Protective of both his suppliers and his buyers, he did not volunteer information about particular sales. Jim Elroy thinks that, at ten thousand dollars a bottle or more, Rodenstock could have sold ten bottles a month and made more than a million dollars a year. As Koch was launching his suit against Rodenstock, a Massachusetts software entrepreneur named Russell Frye filed a lawsuit against the Wine Library, a distributor in Petaluma, California, alleging that it had sold him nineteenth-century Lafite and Yquem, along with dozens of other rare old wines, that were counterfeit. Frye’s complaint notes that one of the defendants in the case “has recently informed plaintiff that many of the bottles that plaintiff alleges are counterfeit or questionable were ultimately obtained from Hardy Rodenstock.”

Koch owns some forty thousand bottles of wine, stored in three cellars. In May, I visited one, a refrigerated warren of dark-wood racks underneath his house in Osterville, on Cape Cod. Jim Elroy had sought the help of two experts, David Molyneux-Berry and Bill Edgerton, to go through the cellar and identify suspicious bottles.

Molyneux-Berry worked at Sotheby’s for years before becoming a private wine consultant, and it was he who rejected Hans-Peter Frericks’s bottle of Th.J. Lafitte. In Frericks’s cellar, he had identified one obvious fake after another. According to the collector’s detailed records, they had all come from Hardy Rodenstock. Molyneux-Berry was also suspicious of Rodenstock’s many colorful discoveries. As a representative of Sotheby’s, Molyneux-Berry had made frequent official trips to Russia. “I went to Kiev and saw the cellar there,” he told me. “I went to Moldova and saw the cellars there. I had the highest introductions you can get. Yet Rodenstock goes to Russia and finds the tsar’s cellars somewhere else. And it’s the entire first growth of Bordeaux. . . . And he found magnums. In volume.”

From a sample of three thousand bottles of pre-1961 vintages of often counter-



"That's right—blame the victimizer."

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feited brands, Molyneux-Berry and Edgerton identified about a hundred and thirty suspicious or obviously fake bottles in Koch's collection. "You get to know what bottles look like," Molyneux-Berry told me. "Obvious fakes stand out like a sore thumb." They put a white sticker on each suspicious bottle. The next day, a professional photographer took high-resolution pictures, which, if necessary, could be introduced in court.

In some cases, the bottle, the label, and the capsule all appeared genuine, but the rarity of the wine alone was ground for suspicion. Koch owns two magnums of Lafleur from 1947, for instance. "Forty-seven is the great Lafleur," Molyneux-Berry said. But, he continued, he has heard that in 1947 the vineyard bottled only five magnums. "What's the chance of him having two out of five?" he asked. Edgerton maintains an online database that tracks auction sales and prices. Nineteen magnums of '47 Lafleur have sold at auction since 1998.

Serena Sutcliffe, of Sotheby's, told me that most wealthy collectors would rather not know about the fakes, or, if they do know, would rather not make it public. She said that on a number of occasions she has inspected a cellar that a collector was interested in auctioning and rejected it, in whole or in part, because of the preponderance of fakes, only to learn that the collector sold the phony wine through one of her competitors. The collectors "don't want to take the hit," she said.

"The case is much bigger" than Rodenstock, Koch told me. "When I get finished going through all the wine in my collection, I'm going after all the people who sold it to me," he said. "The retailers, they know they're doing it. They're complicit."

One of Koch's problem bottles is a magnum of 1921 Pétrus that he bought for thirty-three thousand dollars at an auction organized by the New York wine retailer Zachys, in 2005. Koch believes that the wine originated from Rodenstock; he mentions the bottle in his lawsuit. (Zachys says it has no evidence to indicate whether the wine originally came from Rodenstock.) It was another magnum of 1921 Pétrus that Robert Parker had awarded a hundred points and pronounced "out of this universe" at Rodenstock's Munich event in 1995.

Last spring, Jim Elroy took Koch's magnum to Bordeaux to have it inspected at the winery. The Pétrus staff ultimately concluded that the cork was the wrong length, and that the cap and the label appeared to have been artificially aged. Pétrus confirmed that they had doubts about the authenticity of the bottle. And the cellar master, in his interview with Elroy, said that he had never heard of a magnum of 1921 Pétrus and did not believe that any were bottled at the vineyard.

This raised an interesting question. If Pétrus made no magnums in 1921, what was Parker drinking at the Rodenstock event? Parker's nose is insured for a million dollars; it seems almost pathological that Rodenstock would invite such a man to his table and serve him a fake. Elroy sees this as further proof of Rodenstock's guilt, maintaining that this kind of risktaking is not unusual in a counterfeiter. "I know a lot about fraudsters," he said. "I put a lot of them in prison. They feel, I'm so smart. I'm smarter than anyone in the world. Rodenstock feels that way."

If indeed Parker's hundred-point 1921 Pétrus was a fake, such hubris might not be misplaced. Could Rodenstock have become so proficient at making fake wine that his fakes tasted as good as, or even better than, the real thing? When I asked Parker about the bottle, he hastened to say that even the best wine critics are fallible. Yet he reiterated that the bottle was spectacular. "If that was a fake, he should be a mixer," Parker said. "It was wonderful."

Early this summer, Hardy Rodenstock fired the Manhattan lawyers he had engaged to contest Koch's suit. In a letter to the trial judge, he objected that the court had no jurisdiction over him, as a German citizen; that Koch had bought the bottles not directly from him but from third parties; and that the case should be barred by the statute of limitations. It might be Koch's "hobby to take actions against people for years," he suggested, but he wanted no part of "such 'silly games.' " After spelling out his objections, he announced, "I get out of the procedure."

Rodenstock would not agree to be interviewed for this piece, but in a series of faxes, most of them in German, he maintained his innocence and fiercely objected to Bill Koch's portrayal of him, denouncing Koch's "concoctions and shenanigans." He acknowledged that his legal name is Meinhard Goerke, but insisted that many people change their names, pointing to Larry King as an example. Rodenstock denied telling Tina York that he was a member of the Rodenstock family, and maintained that he was indeed a professor, writing, "That is a fact! Verifiable!" He disputed accounts that he found a hundred cases of Bordeaux in Venezuela, observing, "That would be 1200 bottles?!?!?!" As for Andreas Klein's allegations about finding empty bottles and labels in his basement, Rodenstock wrote that it was not uncommon for wine connoisseurs to save empties after a wine tasting. "I take the labels from old bottles to have them framed," he said. "This looks very nice!" He denied supplying any bottles to the Wine Library, or the magnum of Pétrus that Koch mentioned in the lawsuit, and insisted, "My 1921 Pétrus bottles were always absolutely genuine!!!" He cited Parker's hundred-point review, and asked, "Is there any better proof that the wine was genuine when world-renowned experts described it as superb and gave it the highest possible grade?"

Rodenstock took particular exception to Bill Koch's account of their one meeting, in 2000, at Christie's Latour tasting. "I was *not* late!!" he insisted. "I neither looked uncomfortable nor did I run away from him fast. My facial expression was, I am sure, full of pleasant anticipation of the wonderful Latour tasting. I was in a very good mood!!!" In Rodenstock's recollection, Koch said that he owned some Jefferson bottles, and Rodenstock replied, "Good for you, but you didn't get them from me."

When it comes to the authenticity of the Th.J. bottles, Rodenstock offers a number of sometimes contradictory defenses. "If Christie's had the slightest doubt about the authenticity, they would not have accepted the bottle of 1787 Lafitte," he wrote. "I am therefore beyond reproach!" He suggested that Koch's analysis of the initials was performed not by scientists but by "amateur engravers" who were friends of Koch, and were being paid for their conclusions. But in his letter to the court he entertained the possibility that the initials were modern, hypothesizing that whoever originally sold him the wines "had some bottles re-engraved over the old engravings . . . because they were no longer clearly legible." He has also suggested that Koch himself or one of his staff may have had the bottles reëngraved, and added, "A great deal can have happened to the bottles in twenty years!!!" (When Hans-Peter Frericks sued over his Jefferson bottle, Rodenstock made a similar claim, suggesting that Frericks had tampered with his own bottle in order to frame Rodenstock.)

On August 14th, the magistrate judge, who has supervised pretrial procedural issues, recommended that the court enter a default judgment against Rodenstock, because of his refusal to participate. The trial judge must now decide whether or not to accept Rodenstock's various procedural defenses. But even if he is handed a default judgment Rodenstock insists that German courts will not enforce it.

Meanwhile, Jim Elroy has turned over the findings of his investigation to the authorities, a grand jury has been convened to hear evidence, and the F.B.I. has begun issuing subpoenas to wine collectors, dealers, and auction houses. "It's going to have a salutary effect on the whole industry," Koch told me. "And if the judge throws the lawsuit out for some technical reason I've got five others I could bring."

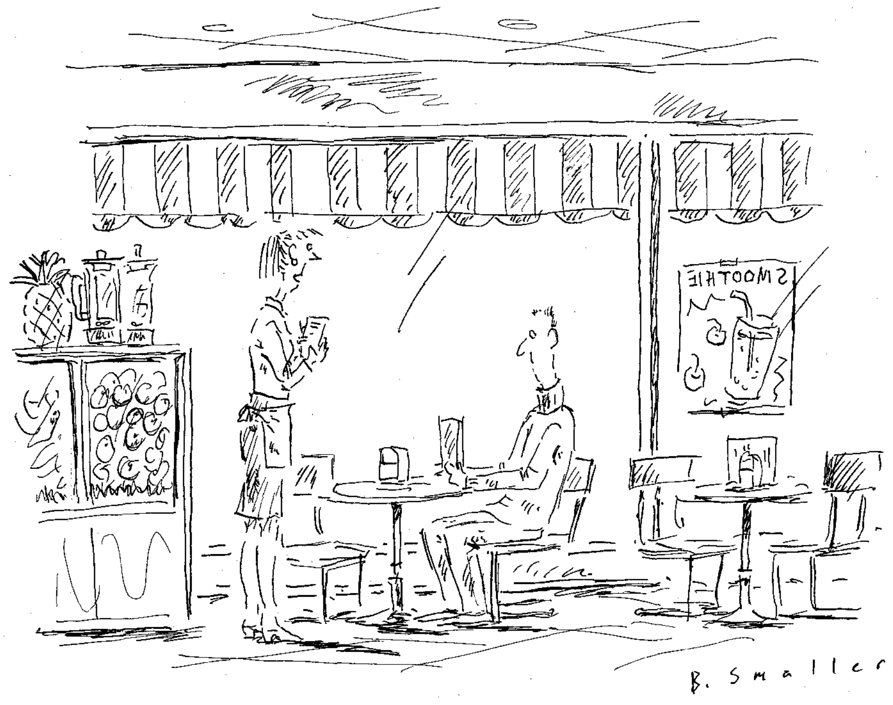
In the back of his Palm Beach wine cellar, past rows of priceless bottles, behind elegant cast-iron grillework, is a closet in which Koch keeps his very oldest bottles, many of which he now believes are fake. I picked up a bottle of the 1787 Th.J. Lafitte. It was cold and surprisingly heavy in my hands, and I ran my fingers over the letters. Could a shared passion for the rarest old wines have blinded everyone—the collectors, the critics, the auctioneers—to the sheer improbability of those initials? Jefferson had asked in the 1790 letter that his wine and Washington's wine be marked, but surely he was referring to the cases and not the individual bottles.

Koch uncorked a bottle of 1989 Montrachet, and we walked upstairs and settled into comfortable leather chairs in the cowboy room. The wine was crisp and minerally; to my untutored palate, it tasted pretty good. As we discussed the case, I noticed that Koch seemed anything but aggrieved. He has thrown himself into his battle against Rodenstock and phony wine with the same headlong enthusiasm that he devoted to collecting wine. "I used to brag that I got the Thomas Jefferson wines," he said. "Now I get to brag that I have the fake Thomas Jefferson wines."

Outside, the sun was beginning to set, and Koch's chef informed him that dinner would be softshell crab and venison. Koch flipped through his cellar book, a hefty binder listing his wines. Upstairs, one of the children was bouncing a basketball. Bridget Rooney walked in, with the couple's one-year-old daughter, Kaitlin, in her arms. "We're talking fake wine," Koch said. "Want to join us?"

Rooney took a seat next to him. She wore a rope of enormous pearls around her neck, and didn't seem to notice that Kaitlin was chewing on them. She reached for Koch's glass and took a sip.

"Mmm," she murmured. "That's not fake." ♦



"Flax is this year's tofu."

FICTION

LUDA AND MILENA

BY LARA VAPNYAR

Milena had large blue eyes, an elegant nose, and olive skin covered with a graceful network of fine wrinkles. "Her face is a battlefield for anti-aging creams," Luda said of Milena, adding that she wouldn't want youth that came from bottles and jars. Once, Luda brought old photographs of herself to class to show Milena that she, too, had been a real beauty. The photographs revealed an attractive woman with a sturdy hourglass figure, imposing dense brows, and very dark eyes. Some people saw a striking resemblance to the young Elizabeth Taylor, but Milena didn't. Milena said that the young Luda looked like Saddam Hussein with bigger hair and a thinner mustache.

The two women met on the first day of a free E.S.L. class held in one of the musty back rooms of Brooklyn College. Luda was late. She had been babysitting her two grandchildren, and her son-in-law had failed to come home on time. Angry and flustered, Luda had had to run all the way to the college, pushing through the rush-hour subway crowd, cutting through the meat market on Nostrand Avenue, and having the following exchange with a large woman in a pink jacket:

WOMAN: "Watch it, asshole!"

LUDA: "No, it is you asshole!"

By the time Luda opened the classroom door, the students had already started their introductions. "My wife and I love America. We want to show it our respect by learning to speak its language," a short man with a shiny nose and shinier forehead was telling the class. A young woman across the room nodded enthusiastically as he spoke. Luda guessed that she was the teacher. "Angela Waters—Angie—endji" was written on the board. Luda headed for the only empty seat, against the wall, squeezing her large body between the flimsy chairs that sagged under the weight of the E.S.L. students. "I'm sorry. Excuse me," she said when she brushed against somebody with the stretched-out flaps of her cardigan.

"I apologize," she whispered to a thin, well-dressed older woman in the next seat as she sat down. "Don't worry," the woman whispered back in Russian. "Actually, I was afraid that some country bumpkin would sit next to me."

MARTIN PARR / MAGNUM

Luda was about to answer with a sympathetic smile, but the smile died in midair. Had the woman just expressed relief or confirmation of her fears? She couldn't possibly have taken her for a country bumpkin, could she? You old bitch! Luda thought, just in case.

"Ludmila Benina, Luda, seventy-two years old, been in the U.S. for four years," she introduced herself, in rough but confident English, when Angie pointed at her with her chin. "I came to this class to improve my grammar and communication skills. I am a widow, I have a daughter and two grandchildren. I used to be a professor of economics in Moscow. I have written three college textbooks. One of my articles was translated into Hindi and appeared in a magazine in India. I used to participate in conferences all over the Soviet Union, and once in Bulgaria." She threw a sideways glance at her seatmate, checking to see if she was impressed. If she was, her expression didn't betray it.

"Milena from St. Petersburg," she said when her turn came. Nothing else. Luda felt stupid. She wished she hadn't brought up the conferences. It would have been enough just to tell about her professorship and her books. She could have mentioned the conferences later, in future classes, in a casual way. Her unease lasted through the introductions of two elderly Russian couples, two elderly Chinese couples, three middle-aged Dominican couples, one handsome young Haitian man, one very tall, very old, and very loud Haitian woman with a funny name—Oolna—and one dark-skinned woman who spoke so fast and with such a heavy accent that nobody could understand what she said or where she came from.

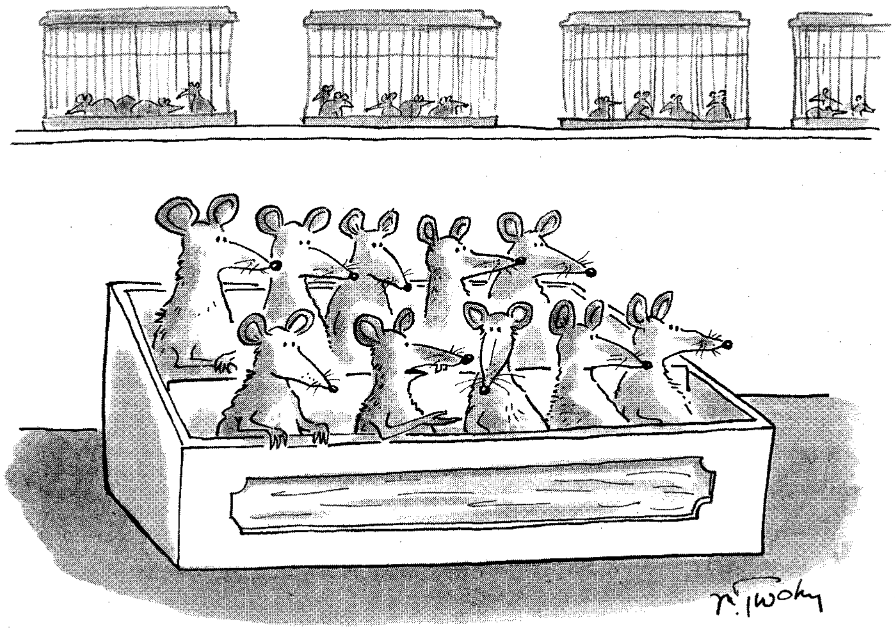
Then a man sitting in the back stood up and cleared his throat. "Aron Skolnik, seventy-nine. I used to live in Brooklyn with my wife. She died four years ago. Now I live in Brooklyn alone." Luda raised her eyes and peered at Aron. The expression on his face was strange, uncertain, as if he weren't sure whether living alone was a bad or a good thing, as if he both welcomed the solitude and found it stifling. Luda had a sudden urge to reach over and touch the thin wisp of hair that stuck to his forehead.

Milena glanced at Aron, straightened her shoulders, removed her Versace sunglasses, shook out her hair, and positioned the glasses on top of her head.

Luda snorted and thought, Look at the old slut!

That night, as she lay in bed on her rock-hard mattress, Luda continued to think about Milena. There had been a moment, after Luda took off her cardigan and hung it over her chair, when Milena actually sniffed the air and moved farther away in her seat. It was true that Luda hadn't bathed in a while, but this was not because she was lazy or disliked cleanliness; it was simply because she disliked being cold. After being submerged in a bath that was warmer than the air, she found getting out unbearable. Freezing. Freezing. Shivering. Groping for a towel. Shaking. For some reason, the cold always filled her with panic. If only there were a way not to freeze afterward, she wouldn't mind taking a bath. Really. If, for example, there were somebody waiting for her with a large, thick towel held out in his arms. She had a fleeting image of Aron standing in her bathroom, wearing silly shorts. The image was both touching and ridiculous.

Luda groaned as she turned onto her side. "It's a Sealy Posturepedic mattress, Mother, very expensive," Luda's daughter had said. She had given it to Luda after her husband had tried it and hated it. Luda's apartment was almost entirely furnished by her daughter. There was a rickety kitchen table that Luda's daughter had used when she first came to America. There was a flowery sofa that Luda's daughter's friends had found too tacky. There was a black bookcase that had appeared in Luda's apartment after her daughter bought a set of light-brown shelves. Only one thing was Luda's own acquisition—a leather armchair with scratched legs and a big slash across the back. Luda had found it next to a pile of garbage about six blocks from her home. She had called a taxi and paid the driver five dollars for delivery and another five for dragging the thing upstairs. By the time he got it to her apartment, Luda was feeling happy and generous, so she added two more dollars and half of an Entenmann's apple pie. The armchair had been Luda's prized possession ever since. She especially enjoyed the low groan it made when she sat down. This



"I'll tell you, mock jury duty beats cancer testing."

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was the groan of somebody who was profoundly annoyed with Luda but still loved her very much.

Milena's apartment was barely furnished at all. She slept on a narrow sofa that she had bought from her brother for sixty dollars. Her TV stood on the floor, and her VCR sat right on top of it, which caused the VCR to overheat, as Milena's brother repeatedly pointed out. He'd sold her his VCR after buying a DVD player for himself, and he felt it was his duty to insure that the VCR was used correctly. Milena ignored his warnings, just as she ignored his offer to sell her a large chest of drawers. Her favorite pieces of furniture were her chairs. She had nine of them, all different, all bought at one garage sale or another, the prices ranging from eight dollars to fifty cents (that one didn't have a seat). She used her chairs as stands for large photographs and posters, as shelves for vases, and sometimes as hangers for dresses, because the sight of good clothes never failed to cheer her up. One chair served as a nightstand. It was a wooden chair with a square seat, the perfect size and shape to hold a couple of books and the large shoebox where she kept her pills, some squeezed-out tubes of expensive anti-wrinkle cream, some smaller photographs, and a pencil sketch of the man who had been her lover for more than twenty years—which included several breakups, other lovers, his never-ending marriage to another woman, and her short-lived marriage to another man.

Milena opened the shoebox and started looking for her sleeping pills. She wondered if Luda really had been as famous and successful as she claimed. So many people lied. That old Haitian hag had claimed to own a chain of expensive boutiques. A chain! Or that pathetic little man who claimed that he used to be the most famous psychiatrist in Minsk—"You won't believe the bribes they were willing to pay just to get an appointment with me." But Milena didn't really blame them for lying. In fact, when the teacher asked them to introduce themselves, Milena, too, had been tempted to lie. The other students' introductions had made her whole life seem like a risible string of "none"s, "never"s, "no"s, and "so-so"s. She didn't have a husband. She didn't have children. She'd graduated from a mediocre college. She'd worked at the same boring job for thirty years. Once, she had been offered a very promising position in Moscow, but she hadn't been able to leave St. Petersburg, because her lover was in St. Petersburg, and, besides, Moscow was known for being populated by pushy, conceited, obnoxious people. Just look at Luda, with her conferences in Bulgaria!

Then Milena remembered that she had lied in class after all. Her documents stated that her first name was Ludmila. It was her lover who had started calling her Milena, claiming that her real name didn't suit her. Luda and Mila, the usual diminutives of Ludmila, were too common for her, he'd said. Milena sounded just right. An exotic name, light, nimble, and unique. She had enjoyed that name. She had enjoyed being a small, elegant, irritating puzzle. Now she was too tired to enjoy it. Now she wished she could slump in somebody's arms, and be easy and reachable, and be stroked on the head with tenderness and pity.

"The International Feast," Angie wrote on the whiteboard the next day. "We're going to start this Friday, and then we'll have it every week." She had a large blue marker stain on her cheek, but it didn't prevent her from looking enthusiastic. "We'll create a wonderful informal atmosphere, so that you can all improve your conversational skills and get acquainted with your diverse cultures. You don't have to bring expensive or complicated dishes. Something simple, typical of your country." Luda wrote it down: "Fri, feast. Bring Rus. food. Diversity. Culture. Simple." She looked over Milena's shoulder and saw that Milena had put a fat red star over Friday in her calendar. Of course, Luda thought. An International Feast, with its food, culture, and informal atmosphere, would be a perfect opportunity to get a man to notice you, and Milena knew this as well as Luda.

That Friday, the students pushed some of the desks against the wall to create an open space, and put their foil, plastic, and paper containers on the teacher's desk, in the center. The diverse cultures were represented by fried plantains, duck gizzards, *pastelitos*, *tostones*, corn fritters, shrimp spring rolls, two kinds of Russian potato salad, a package of hard ring-shaped Russian pretzels, and an extra-value meal from McDonald's, brought by the couple who wanted to show their respect for the United States by learning its language. "Our country is America now—we eat American food," the man explained with a proud expression. But Angie wouldn't allow her students to eat yet. "Mingle, guys, mingle, you have to mingle first," she kept saying. So they all crowded around the desk, sipping soda from plastic cups and trying to make conversation.

Luda studied the room, trying to think of a way to approach Aron. She was wearing a bright scarf, stolen the day before from her daughter's drawer, and dark lipstick that she had found at the bottom of the same drawer. "Wipe it off, Grandma," her six-year-old granddaughter had said. "You look stupid." Now she was afraid that her granddaughter had been right. Luda couldn't figure out how to mingle. The Chinese wouldn't mingle with anybody but the Chinese, the Dominicans clearly preferred other Dominicans, and the two Russian couples stuck together, with the wives expressing visible displeasure whenever Luda tried to approach them. She had experienced this kind of displeasure before. Her very presence seemed to irk married women of her age, not because they saw her as a threat but, rather, because her widowhood and loneliness reminded them that they could end up like her. They looked at Luda with wary squeamishness, as if she were a mangy dog. Oolna was the only person who didn't mind talking to Luda, but she was too old, and Luda didn't want to appear old by association. As for Aron, he clearly preferred the company of Jean-Baptiste, the handsome young Haitian, perhaps finding kinship in the fact that they were the only two single guys in the class. "So tell me, Jean-Baptiste, do they try to fix you up?" Aron asked. "They try to fix me up a lot. But I don't know, I don't know. You know what they say: Marry a dancer when you're in your twenties, a masseuse when you're in your forties, and a nurse when you're in your sixties. But what about me, my friend? I'm seventy-nine." Luda sighed. There was no way she could break into this conversation.

Milena wasn't mingling, either. She had flitted in like a summer breeze, put a package of square Russian biscuits on the table, and sat down on the edge of one of the desks, not looking at anybody, her legs crossed. Summer breeze with creaking joints, Luda thought, but she was worried. One passing glance from Milena told her that she did look stupid in her scarf and her lipstick. Luda knew that look very well. Mocking, condescending, pitying. She had seen it all too often on the faces of her husband's countless secretaries, all attractive single women.

Milena smoothed the folds of her skirt and looked out the window. She thought she'd just sit and wait until Aron noticed her. "Impress and ignore" had been her strategy for years, but she wasn't sure if it still worked. It had been a while since she'd had the ability to turn heads, and sometimes she thought that the saddest thing about this was that she couldn't say exactly when it had gone. Men had looked at her, and now they didn't. Something had been there, and now it wasn't; it was as if a part of her had died and she hadn't even noticed. Still, she couldn't think of any other strategy. She knew that trying to approach other couples was pointless—married women of her age looked at her as if she were a disease. Their warning stares reminded her of the expression on the face of her lover's wife in the photograph he kept on his desk. Every time Milena had seen it, she'd felt that the wife was staring directly at her. Luda looked a little like that wife. The same heavy features, the same stupid scarf. Respectable, boring, the very picture of righteousness.

Oh, really? Luda thought, having caught Milena's stare. Respectable? Boring? For your information, I have had lovers, too. "Lovers" was stretching it a bit, but Luda had had one encounter, with a colleague, on the last night of the three-day conference in Bulgaria. The man's name was Stoyan. He was solid and dark, with jet-black hair spurting above his collarbone. He had offered to see her to her hotel, and on the way, as they discussed the problems of the advanced socialist economic system, Luda couldn't help but marvel at the similarity of his name to the Russian word for erection. Later, in bed, he asked her to call out his name, but she wouldn't—she was too bashful. I'm not as innocent as you think, Luda thought, defiantly fixing her scarf. Let's just see, let's just see.

But then Angie announced that it was time to eat, and the students ditched their conversation partners and rushed toward the food. Plastic tops were removed, foil peeled off, paper containers unclasped, and the room filled with a happy clatter, the air with culturally diverse aromas: curry, ginger, garlic, basil. The spring rolls were the first to go. One moment there

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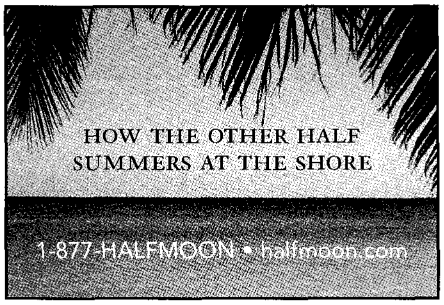

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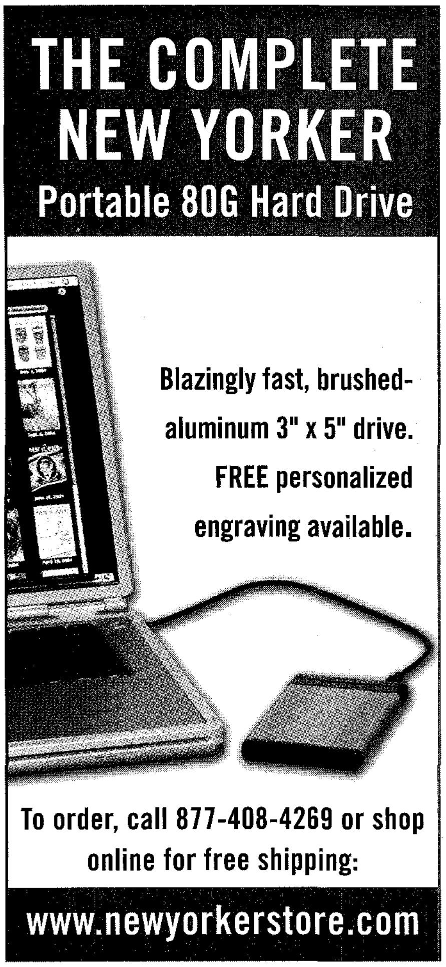
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was a whole plateful of them, and the next there was nothing but oily stains on the students' fingers and a wonderful shrimp-and-scallion aftertaste in their mouths. The *tostones* and *pastelitos* followed. The Dominicans and the Russians were a little skeptical about duck gizzards but soon learned to appreciate them. Nobody was particularly enthusiastic about the two varieties of potato salad, so the two Russian couples who had brought them ate each other's offering. The extra-value-meal couple ate their extra-value meal. By the end of the feast, there were only two items left: the hard round pretzels and the hard square biscuits. Angie ate one of each and politely pronounced them authentic and interesting, but nobody appeared to share her interest.

Both Luda and Milena realized that they had made a mistake. As soon as they saw how Aron's face changed when the food was uncovered, they knew that they should have brought something more exciting. At first, his expression was hopeful but uncertain, as if he were a child who spied a longed-for toy but wasn't sure if it was meant for him. As he filled his plate, the cautious grin disappeared into the deep furrows of a beaming smile. He chewed slowly, with his eyes closed, making sounds similar to the drone of a happy electric appliance. His cheeks became flushed and tiny beads of sweat gathered on the bridge of his nose. "Who made this? This is divine!" he would exclaim from time to time. He finished the last spring roll, crinkled his nose, and laughed. He looked radiant, he looked twenty years younger, he looked—Luda couldn't think of the word right away, then it hit her—he looked inspired. You couldn't help but smile, watching Aron eat. And so Luda smiled. And Milena smiled, too. Luda and Milena had, of course, heard that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach, but they had never believed it. Aron Skolnik convinced them.

The problem was that neither Luda nor Milena liked to cook. Milena had a particularly tortured relationship with food. For years and years, her life had been structured around her lover's visits. He'd come to her place after work, twice a week, and spend about an hour with her. "No, no," he would say when she offered him food. "Let's not waste time. Anyway, my wife is waiting for me with dinner." Milena attempted to cook for herself at times, out of defiance. She'd mix the ingredients in a bowl, telling herself that she didn't care, that she could cook and enjoy a good meal by herself. "I don't care, I don't care," she would say as she scooped the contents of the bowl into the garbage pail.

And Luda—Luda had always been too busy working. Moreover, for most of her married life she had lived with her mother-in-law, who cooked a lot and enjoyed it, especially if she came up with a dish that Luda couldn't stand. Once Luda figured this out, she learned to fake her culinary preferences. To confuse her mother-in-law, she would feign great enthusiasm for food that she hated ("Zucchini pancakes!"), asking for seconds, and appear indifferent to things that she really liked. She mastered the art of faking so well that by the time her mother-in-law died, and she could finally start eating according to her real preferences, she found that she no longer had preferences. Her sense of taste had been ruined; her interest in food was gone.

But that didn't mean that she couldn't learn how to cook, Luda thought, the Thursday before the second feast, while flipping through the TV channels at home. Learning how to cook was a challenge, and she was used to meeting challenges head on. The first three shows she watched on the Food Network were a complete waste of time. Luda couldn't have cared less about the chili cook-off, nor did she need information on candy-making. On the third show, the host explained how to make tiramisu, which might have been helpful were it not for the host's cleavage—so prominent that Luda couldn't concentrate on the movements of her hands. The fourth show, however, was better. The host was making a Greek feta-and-spinach pie, and she seemed to know what she was doing. Plus, her cleavage, if she had any, was well hidden under her chef's jacket. Luda opened a notebook and wrote down the instructions.

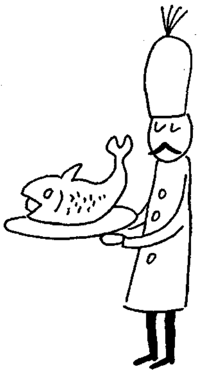
The pie worked! Luda herself was surprised at how well it came out. She'd had some doubts as she was spreading the filling over the dough. To make the pie seem authentically Russian, she had substituted cabbage for spinach and boiled eggs for feta cheese, and she had got rid of the pine nuts altogether. She'd had a moment's worry about those stupid pine nuts—perhaps they were the key ingredient after all. But when Luda took the pie out of the oven—not as perfect as on TV, far from perfect, but warm and gleaming and fragrant—all her doubts disappeared. She closed her eyes and imagined Aron's smile, and then—and this was the most delicious image—the stunned and furious expression on Milena's face.

Aron actually moaned when he tried the first piece. When he finished a second piece, he took a napkin, wiped his lips, and looked at Luda. Looked at her and saw her. It had been such a long time since a man had seen her. "So good. I could eat it every day and not get tired of it," he said. But even this didn't give her as big a thrill as the lost expression on Milena's face. Poor Milena, Luda thought. Poor Milena, who had worn a low-cut blouse and brought store-bought eggplant caviar and to whom Aron had said, "Did you buy it at the International on Fifth and Brighton? They make a much better one at the Taste of Europe in Bensonhurst." Poor, poor Milena.

I wonder what the fat pig will make today, Milena thought as she entered her bathroom the next Friday morning with a steaming mug of coffee and a pack of cigarettes, and a book tucked under her arm. She sat down on the toilet, put her coffee and the book on top of the laundry hamper, and lit a cigarette. People like Luda resembled battering rams—they pummelled and pummelled, patiently, without taking a break, for as long as it took them to get what they wanted. Milena's lover's wife had been the same way, and she had got her prize in the end. She had kept her husband, who had finally become a really good husband, now that he was too old, too worn out, too scared, and too beaten down to cheat. And Milena, stupid, proud Milena, who had always thought that it was beneath her to fight for a man, what did she have? Nothing. She had wound up with nothing. Just look at her now, old and alone, sitting on a toilet with a coffee mug and a cigarette! Well, she wouldn't be above fighting for a man this time.

She took a sip of coffee and started leafing through her book, an old cookbook, with thin yellowed pages and elaborate drawings, a legacy from her allegedly aristocratic grandmother. There had been countless long mornings when Milena's grandmother had sat little Milena—Ludmila then—at the kitchen table to teach her how to make *pozharskie kotlety* or *rasstegai*. Afterward, she had graded Milena's work, usually poorly. How Milena had hated those mornings! But she had learned how to cook. Surprise, surprise, fat pig!

"Look, guys, we have something new from one of our Russian students today," Angie said, taking a blue cotton napkin off Milena's porcelain plate. There, under the napkin, were more than a dozen perfect golden square cheese puffs that smelled as if they had been taken out of the oven a second ago. There was a secret to that, which Milena's grandmother had shared with Milena as a gift on her sixteenth birthday. (Milena would have preferred earrings.) The puffs were so beautiful that the students couldn't bring themselves to just grab them as they did the other food at the feast. They picked up the cheese puffs with two fingers and chewed slowly and didn't talk while they chewed, so that all you could hear was the sound of small crunchy bites. When all the puffs were gone, Aron flicked a few golden crumbs off his shirt and asked Milena what her name was. "Beautiful and unusual," he commented when she replied.



Luda didn't know much about medicine, so she wasn't sure if extreme frustration could cause an immediate heart attack. The worst thing was the look on Milena's face when Luda unpeeled the foil from her offering. The bitch actually chuckled. Yes, Luda had brought another Greek-Russian cabbage pie. So what? It had worked the last time—what was so stupid about assuming that it would work again? Luda loosened her scarf and sat down. She tried telling herself that Milena's offering wasn't better than hers—it was simply new—but this thought failed to console her, as it had failed to console her over the years, every time she had sniffed yet another whiff of new perfume on her husband's shirt.

A big heavy arm on her shoulder

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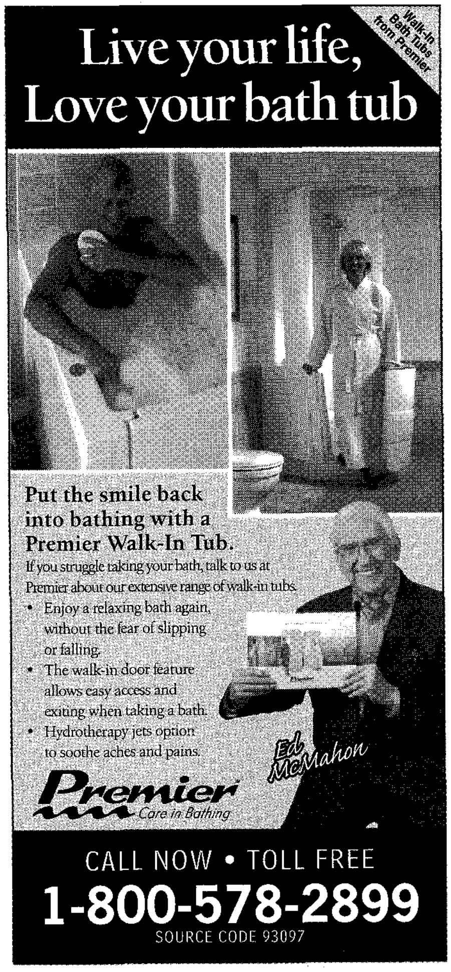

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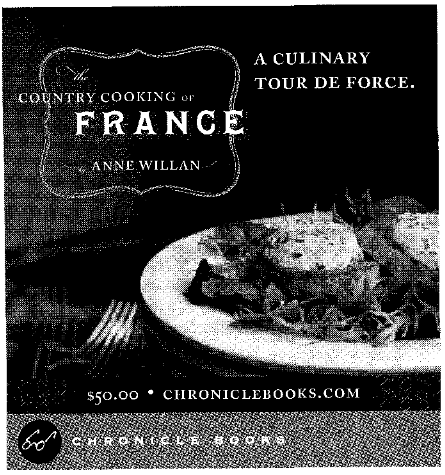

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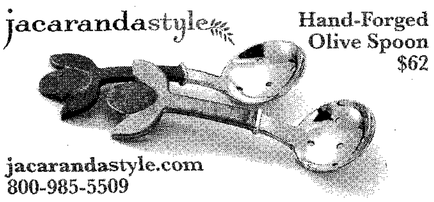

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made Luda flinch. “I didn’t like her puffs,” Oolna said. “Showoff—not real food.” Luda wanted to bury her face in Oolna’s soft boundless chest and weep with gratitude. And then the wife from one of the Russian couples sidled over and whispered that she hadn’t liked the puffs, either. “Too salty, didn’t you think? And she is wearing way too much makeup for her age.”

In the weeks to come, Luda understood that she wasn’t just an annoying old woman anymore—she was the star of the show. The whole network of clumsy alliances was quickly spinning around her. There was Oolna, the oldest and truest of her fans. There was the Russian wife, and there was the Dominican couple who didn’t like feeling intimidated by Milena’s clothes and haughty demeanor. The husband even made a show of mocking Milena’s manner of entering the room, and all the members of Luda’s fan club laughed eagerly.

But Milena, too, found herself surrounded by allies. First, there was the Chinese woman who had nursed a grudge against Luda since the day Luda’s pie managed to outshine her spring rolls. And there was the second Chinese couple, who joined her camp simply because they always sided with the first Chinese couple. All of them had laughed happily when Milena compared Luda to Saddam Hussein. The husband of the second Chinese couple was deaf in one ear, so his wife had to retell the joke loudly and in Chinese, and then he laughed, too.

But while both camps acknowledged that there was a contest going on, and while everybody knew what the prize was, nobody ever mentioned Aron. If he knew about the contest, he never showed it. He seemed to be bent on preserving his independence and his right to favor the weekly winner. There were Fridays when Luda’s dish would come out too sloppy (either the fault of a Food Network host or of Luda’s zeal). And there were Fridays when Milena’s offering was just a bit too subtle or too bland. And since Aron’s romantic gestures always went strictly in synch with the competition, Luda’s and Milena’s gains and losses in intimacy fluctuated as well. There were Fridays when Aron seemed to have formed a special connection with Luda. He’d sit and talk with her in the corner (after the best food was gone, never before); he’d joke with her, ask her about her life, and make vague suggestions for the future, such as “Do you like Manhattan Beach? It’s nice down there. I go for a stroll sometimes. Not too often.” And sometimes he would walk her most of the way home. Once, Aron even kissed Luda on the cheek. His lips felt warm and dry and vaguely disappointing.

And then there were Fridays that belonged to Milena. Aron would walk with her, and brush his arm against her sleeve, or touch the flaps of her jacket. Once, he even attempted to play with her necklace. And sometimes he would share his memories. One time, for example, he told her about a lovely woman with whom he’d had a brief but passionate affair and who had looked just like Milena. “Seriously, the same eyes, the same cheekbones, even the same oval mole on her neck.” But, just as with Luda, Aron never walked Milena all the way home. He’d stop a few blocks away from her building, and say that walking was getting harder and harder for him and that he needed to head back.

No matter who won, come Monday all of Friday’s intimacy was gone. On Mondays, Aron never gave any sign that he had formed a connection with either of them, never spoke to them before or after class, hardly even looked at them. There was no indication that he wanted either of them, or that he ever would. On Mondays, Luda and Milena felt deflated and tired, too, and perhaps even a little ashamed of their Friday excitement. But as the week drew to an end, their fantasies about Aron grew more and more intense. And as their fantasies flourished so did their fear and fury at the thought that he might pick the other as the ultimate winner.

The afternoon before the last International Feast, Luda plugged in her food processor, pushed cubes of beef and lamb down the tube, and pressed the button. The food processor, a discard from her daughter’s pantry, was a bulky old thing with a crack on the side that was covered by a piece of duct tape. It whirred and vibrated and jumped all over the table, but it did its job well. Luda smiled as she watched the meat cubes crumble under the blades. The onion got stuck in the tube, and she had to push on it with a wooden spoon handle to get it down.

Milena moved about her kitchen quickly and gracefully. She prodded the bread in a bowl of milk with her finger to see if it was soggy enough. She knew that when you make meatballs you should never put the bread into a food processor. First of all, it was soft enough to be easily mashed with a fork, but, more important, coarsely mixed bread was essential to make the meatballs fluffy and plump. She put the bread into a bowl with the ground veal, added some crushed garlic (a lot of it) and a couple of eggs, and started working the mixture with a fork, enjoying the squelching sound.

And now for the secret ingredient, Luda thought, throwing some small cubes of pancetta into the hissing skillet. "Pancetta!" the Food Network host had moaned. "So good, your guests won't know what hit them!"

Fat, Milena thought, all the flavor is in the fat, and people are just kidding themselves when they try to believe otherwise. She put a chunk of nice sweet butter and a smaller chunk of lard in the middle of the skillet and swirled them around. The rest was easy.

No, this wasn't hard at all, Luda decided. Especially if you found the perfect method. She shaped the balls and threw them onto the skillet with her right hand, while holding the spatula with her left. When the meat got all warm and sticky in her fingers, she rinsed her right hand under cold running water and started again. Her small kitchen quickly filled with smoke and the smell of burning fat, but Luda didn't pay any attention to that. She worked very fast.

So did Milena. It was amazing how soon the bowl was empty. As she was shaping the last meatball, Milena had a sudden urge to squeeze it. And she did just that, so hard that bits of soggy meat oozed between her fingers. She wiped her hand and went to open the window.

On the Monday after the last International Feast, Angie's hands trembled so much that she had to grip the wrist of her right hand with her left in order to write on the board. Her legs were shaking as well, so she sat down in the low chair by her desk. She said that it would be nice if everybody could say a few words about Aron.

One of the Dominicans said that it was too bad that Aron hadn't had a family. "That's a wonderful observation," Angie noted.

A man from one of the Chinese couples said that Aron had taught everybody a lesson.

"That's an excellent point." Angie nodded and reached into her purse for a tissue.

She had never had a student die during class before. Nobody she knew had ever had a student die during class. She had been plagued by ghastly flashbacks the whole weekend. Bright and loud, the images of the last feast had kept spinning and spinning in her head, as if she were caught in a horror movie. And now the movie was starting again.

She tunes the radio to some nasty Latino music. They uncover the food. The smell! She is so sick of that smell. The students stomp their feet to the beat of the music. Poor Aron, as happy as a child. Moving closer to the table. Filling his plate. Gorging. Starting to choke. They all step away in horror. Angie pushes buttons on her phone. For the life of her, she can't remember which buttons to push. Jean-Baptiste rushes forward. Grabbing Aron from behind. His fist thrusts into Aron's stomach. Thrusts again. Again and again. Finally! That fucking Russian meatball is out! Sighs of relief all over the room. Angie snaps her phone closed. And then Aron's legs go slack and Jean-Baptiste starts to sway under his weight. For a moment, it looks as if they are dancing together to the loud beats of the music. Old Oolna starts to laugh, a horrible cackling laugh. And then, only then, do they realize what has happened.

Angie blew her nose and looked at her silent class. "Do you want to say something, Jean-Baptiste?"

"Yeah. Aron was a funny man."

"Good, Jean-Baptiste, good," Angie agreed.

Luda said that they would all miss Aron, and Milena said that his was an enviable death. Angie raised her eyebrows.

"Quick and easy. And he died happy, didn't he?" Milena explained in a calm, patient voice.

Angie shuddered and dismissed the class. ♦

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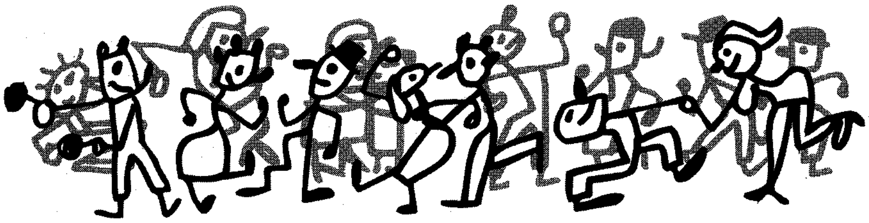

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CLOUD NINE

A new translation of the Paradiso.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

If you haven't yet read the Divine Comedy—you know who you are—now is the time, because Robert and Jean Hollander have just completed a beautiful translation of the astonishing fourteenth-century poem. The Hollanders' Inferno was published in 2000, their Purgatorio in 2003. Now their Paradiso (Doubleday; $40) is out. It is more idiomatic than any other English version I know. At the same time, it is lofty, the more so for being plain. Jean Hollander, a poet, was in charge of the verse; Robert Hollander, her husband, oversaw its accuracy. The notes are by Robert, who is a Dante scholar and a professor emeritus at Princeton, where he taught the Divine Comedy for forty-two years.

Dante's poem is fiendishly difficult to translate into verse, partly because of its lovely, garlanded rhyme scheme, terza rima—or aba, bcb, cdc. To reproduce the Comedy in English terza rima, it has been calculated, approximately forty-five hundred triple rhymes are needed. In Italian, where almost every word ends in a vowel, you can come up with such a number. In English, it is next to impossible, as can be seen in the frequency of ridiculous forced rhymes in terza-rima translations. Some translators have compromised on aba, cdc—in other words, rhyming in twos, not threes—but that's not easy, either, if you're trying to be faithful to Dante's text.

Jean Hollander made a bigger compromise. She has used blank verse, primarily: unrhymed iambic pentameter. Relieved of the task of rhyming, she is able to stay closer to Dante's wording. Nevertheless, her translation is a poem, and it sounds like one. Robert Hollander says that it is heavily indebted to John D. Sinclair's prose translation of 1939-46. (This was the pony of choice when I was in school.) He is being modest. Here is Sinclair's rendering of the opening of the Paradiso:

> The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates the universe and shines in one part more and in another less. I was in the heaven that most receives His light and I saw things which he that descends from it has not the knowledge or the power to tell again; for our intellect, drawing near to its desire, sinks so deep that memory cannot follow it.

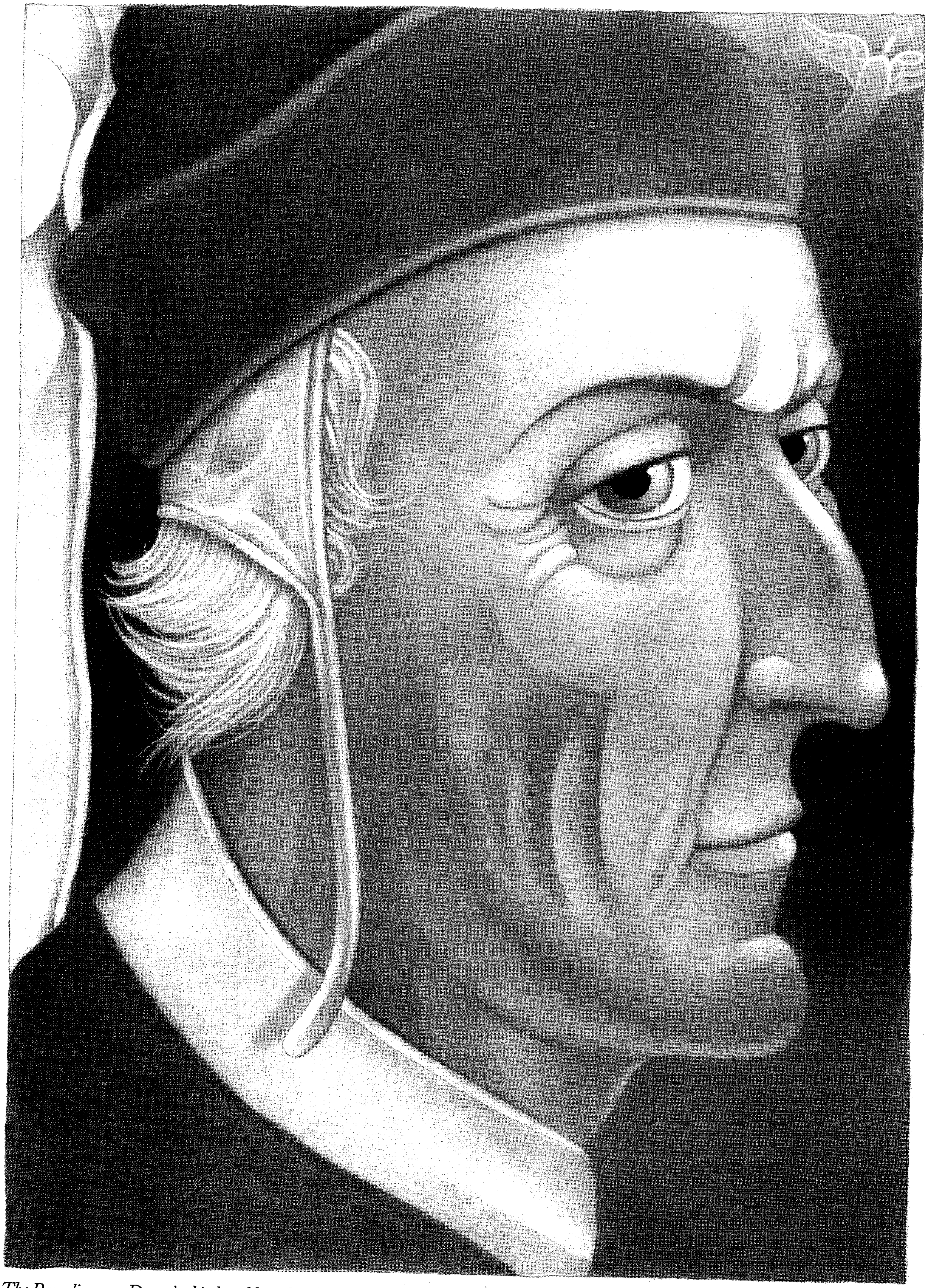
Here is Jean Hollander's version:

> The glory of Him who moves all things
> pervades the universe and shines
> in one part more and in another less.
>
> I was in that heaven which receives
> more of His light. He who comes down from there
> can neither know or tell what he has seen,
>
> for, drawing near to its desire,
> so deeply is our intellect immersed
> that memory cannot follow after it.

Many of her word choices repeat Sinclair's, but her English is both easier to read (notice how she unties the knot in "I saw things which he that descends") and more artistic. She sings; Sinclair doesn't.

In the Paradiso, such blandishments are welcome, for this is the most difficult of the Comedy's three parts, or canticles. The entire Comedy is an allegory, a symbolic representation of the highly systematized theology that St. Thomas Aquinas and other Scholastic philosophers distilled from the Bible, the Church Fathers, and Aristotle in the late Middle Ages. But in the Paradiso the allegory is far more naked than in the Inferno or the Purgatorio. In Dante's time, and for a few centuries afterward, readers of poetry (learned people, mostly priests) were accustomed to allegory, and thought it was a good teaching tool, because it made you work. As Boccaccio said in his "Life of Dante" (1374), "Everything that is acquired with toil has more sweetness in it." But since the early eighteenth century—that is, since Europeans began questioning the faith that is Dante's subject—there has been a tradition of discussing the Comedy in terms of a "duality" between its allegory and its "poetry." What is suggested here is that the allegory is anti-poetical, and that what is acquired with toil is mostly toil. The best-known modern statement of this position is a 1921 book, "The Poetry of Dante," by the philosopher Benedetto Croce. The allegory that is so great a part of the Divine Comedy, Croce declares, is *non-poesia*, "not poetry," and he makes fun of it. Indeed, he ridicules the hallowed opening lines of the Inferno. Here, he says, "we find ourselves in a wood that is not a wood and see a hill that is not a hill, and gaze upon a sun that is not the sun, and meet three wild animals that are and are not wild animals, of which the most menacing is thin, owing to the desires that devour it, and, we do not know how, 'makes many people live in woe.'" This, as Croce sees it, is allegory: material that hasn't been through the furnace of the imagination, hasn't been converted into forceful imagery and emotional truth—that is, into poetry. Poetry comes to you naturally; allegory makes you flip to the notes. And readers, especially first-time readers, should not be consulting notes. They should just ignore the allegory, Croce says, and settle down to enjoy the Comedy as a collection of "lyrics," passages that show the vigor and feeling that, unlike religious symbolism, were Dante's true poetic gifts.

Croce's book fell like a bomb on the Italian literary world—Luigi Pirandello wrote a wrathful review of it—and still today it is regarded by some as an irresponsible document. Nevertheless, it is a pretty accurate reflection of early-twentieth-century poetics. (The replacement of rhetoric with image—"telling" with "showing"—is exactly what Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were calling for at



The Paradiso was Dante's third and last chance to turn our thoughts toward redemption, and he went at the task directly.

"Your moon is in the House of Pancakes."

around the same time.) And, if I am not mistaken, it can be seen waving its arms behind a great deal of later writing on the Comedy. The most eloquent Dante critic of the twentieth century, Erich Auerbach, says in his 1946 book "Mimesis" that the portrait of the Florentine nobleman Farinata degli Uberti in the Inferno is so powerful psychologically that it makes Farinata's placement in the Comedy's theological scheme (as an example of heresy) unimportant: "The image of man eclipses the image of God." So here again is the duality, with no mystery about which side we should prefer. In Farinata and the other great storytellers of the Comedy, Auerbach goes on, "the fullness of life . . . is so rich and so strong that its manifestations force their way into the listener's soul independently of any interpretation." He made the same point in his 1929 book on Dante (recently reissued by New York Review Books). "Dante, Poet of the Secular World": the title says it all.

Modern readers, inheriting the same preference for the concrete, are likely to favor the Inferno, the canticle that most satisfies that taste. They may also love the Purgatorio. In Purgatory, the pilgrim does not have as many stirring encounters as he had in Hell, but he has some. (The main character of the Divine Comedy, the man who makes the journey from Hell to Heaven and narrates it, is clearly autobiographical, but he is not identical with the poet. Sometimes, it seems, he is an unreliable narrator. So he is normally called "the pilgrim" rather than "Dante.") Furthermore, the emotional world of the Purgatorio is one that we understand. The souls in Purgatory are sorry for their sins, and they are in pain—they have to walk through flames and the like—but they are also happy, because they are on their way to Heaven and their companions are coming with them. The emotion, basically, is Christian fellowship, or, to put it in secular terms, a cross between love and wisdom. Such mellow climes of feeling were not Dante's home territory—he was more interested in the agony and the ecstasy—but he makes them present to us, and moving.

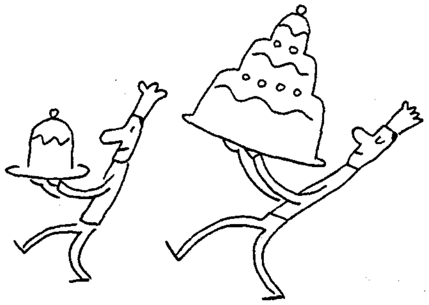
That is not the case with the emotions of the Paradiso. Dante didn't know what Heaven would be like, but he knew that, by definition, it would not contain yearning or pain. Reading the Inferno, you're not sure if the pilgrim is going to make it to the end, so hard is the journey, through rock slides and gullies, across rivers of blood, lockers of ice, burning sands. In Paradise, all he travels through is gradations of light, and he speeds through them effortlessly. In Hell, the damned reach out to him. They want to know what's happening on earth. Is my son still alive? one soul asks him. Another says, Tell me, is Romagna at peace or at war? If they don't want news, they want to tell their story. These riveting "self-narratives," the tales told by Farinata, Francesca da Rimini, Ulysses, Count Ugolino, and others, may be, as Robert Hollander puts it, the "single most defining characteristic" of the Divine Comedy, but they are not the defining characteristic of the Paradiso. In Heaven, only eleven people recount their lives, and only briefly. They average fourteen lines apiece; in Hell, Ugolino alone got seventy-two lines. More important, these stories are not very interesting, because they involve no regrets. The souls in Hell wail and scream and shake their fists at God. The souls in Heaven are at peace. As one of them, Piccarda, tells the pilgrim, they want nothing other than what they already have.

Nor, apart from condemnation of the world's wickedness, do these souls have feeling for anything outside Heaven. We were warned that this was going to be the case. Early in the Inferno, the Roman poet Virgil, the pilgrim's guide through Hell and Purgatory, tells him how he got that assignment. Beatrice, a beautiful woman whom Dante had loved in his youth—and who, if she is the person scholars think she was, died when she and he were both twenty-five—came down from Heaven to Hell and asked Virgil (who is in Hell because he was a pagan) to bring Dante to her. Virgil agreed. Then he asked Beatrice whether it didn't frighten her, accustomed to the peace of Heaven, to come down to Hell. Not at all, she answered briskly: since she went to Heaven, God, in his mercy, had changed her in such a way that the sufferings of the damned had no effect on her. Once Beatrice is reunited with the pilgrim, her relationship to him, too, is largely "post-personal" (Robert Hollander's word). When, after dragging the pilgrim through Hell and Purgatory, Virgil must turn him over to Beatrice and go back down where he belongs, the episode is heartbreaking. People weep over it. But when Beatrice, having conducted the pilgrim to the summit of Paradise, leaves him, the scene is only one-third as long, and the parting is cool and sudden. A minute ago, Beatrice was at the pilgrim's side; now she is gone. Looking up, he sees her seated among the blessed, gazing at God. Would he begrudge her that happiness by wanting her back? No, everything is fine.

Not for us, though. For us, Croce writes, "it is only possible to imagine concrete joy, born of grief and destined to return to grief; or light which in part is shade, fights against shade, conquers it and, in part, is conquered by it." That is, we live in an intermediate, tragic world. Paradise is not like that. Neither, accordingly, is the Paradiso.

This lack of shading is the fundamental problem, poetically, with Heaven's emotional life. The souls there are *uniformly* charitable. "Oh, here is one who will increase our loves!" the spirits in the sphere of Mercury exclaim when the pilgrim arrives there. The souls in the spheres of Venus, Mars, and Jupiter are just as glad to see him, and as their greetings accumulate one starts to feel a little nostalgic for the screaming and farting that went on in Hell. The pilgrim's student-teacher relationship to Beatrice also wears one down. "In my infallible opinion," Beatrice begins. "Now . . . I go back to clarify one point," she continues. The pilgrim never doubts her infallible opinion, but only asks for it with increasing deference.

In answer to his questions, Beatrice gives him, and therefore us, a complete course in Scholastic theology. The Paradiso was Dante's third and last chance to turn our thoughts toward redemption, and he went at the task directly. In the Inferno and the Purgatorio he taught us mostly by example, but the examples were of sin, which can have no place in Heaven. So now he doesn't baby us anymore. Beatrice and her helpers expound theology straight. How can human beings have free will if their actions are predestined? What is the justification for the Crucifixion of Christ? How do things created by God's hand differ, in condition, from those created by His creations? Why and when and how did God make the angels? If you make a vow to offer up something to God, can you substitute something else? At the Last Judgment, will souls in Heaven get their bodies back? Though the explanations are sometimes leavened with metaphor, they are mostly in abstract form. The lesson feels long. Dante knew that we would find it hard. "Tough food," he has Beatrice call it. But being, as he was, an utterly convinced medieval Christian and believing, as he did, that what was at stake was our immortal souls—whether we would suffer forever in his stinking Hell or join the saints in Paradise—he expected us to be eager for this information. At one point, he says that if, now, he stopped telling us about Heaven we would be left in a state of "anguished craving." I wouldn't risk a vote on that today.



Nevertheless, people should read the Paradiso. How can they read the first two-thirds of the story and not the end? Furthermore, it is not a waste of time, whatever our religious inclinations, to learn something about Christianity at its most systematized. For many centuries, European culture was rooted in the Scholastic synthesis. No one can understand Europe's past without it.

There are literary reasons, too, for reading the Paradiso. Of the bliss that is Heaven, Dante makes sublime images: flames and roses, rivers and rainbows. Heaven's light is seen "sparking everywhere, / like liquid iron flowing from the fire." Created things move "toward different harbors / upon the vastness of the sea of being." What most modern readers love Dante for, however, is not his sublimity but its opposite—terseness, earthiness, vigor, the qualities Croce praised him for—and in Paradise we still see this side of him. At one point, Dante says that Beatrice's smile would make a man happy even if he were on fire. Elsewhere, a soul counsels the pilgrim always to tell the truth, and if people don't

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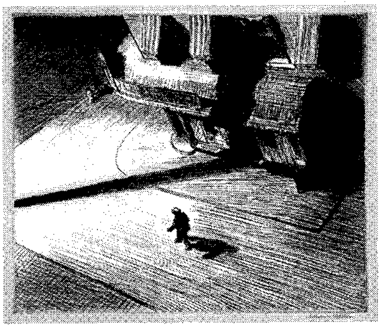

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like it, "let him who itches scratch."

The major source of concreteness, however, is the metaphors, and the best example is the most celebrated one. When he wrote the Divine Comedy, Dante, because his political party had been routed, was in exile from his native city, Florence, and was living with friends, sometimes in Verona, sometimes in Romagna or Ravenna. The Comedy takes place in 1300, two years before he was expelled from Florence, but in Heaven his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida predicts his banishment: he will learn how salty is another man's bread, Cacciaguida says, and how hard it is to go up and down another man's staircase. What could be simpler or more concrete than this—a staircase that seems long, bread that tastes peculiar? (Hollander informs us that, to this day, Florentine bakers make their bread without salt.) Critics exclaim over how much of our world there is in the supposedly otherworldly Comedy. In Paradise, there's less of it, but it's still there. Snow falls; the sun burns off the morning mist. Clocks chime (the first reference in European literature to mechanical timepieces). Babies nurse; pigs and dogs do what they do. A pilgrim arrives at a shrine—the place he has vowed to travel to—and greedily stares here and there in the church, knowing that the minute he gets home his neighbors are going to want to know everything. This last is more than an image; it's a little story.

Among these snapshots of life, some are not as simple or as lyrical as the sun burning through the mist. Instead, they involve complicated mental processes, which Dante has to take us through, thus risking a lowering of tone. There is a marvellous example in the Purgatorio. At the gate to Purgatory, an angel inscribes seven "P"s (for the seven deadly sins, or *peccati*) on the pilgrim's forehead. On each ledge of the mountain, he will vicariously expiate one sin, and one of the "P"s will vanish. When the first one drops off, however, he doesn't know what has happened:

> Then I did as those who go along,
> with something on their head, unknown to them,
> unless its effect on others makes them wonder,
> so that they reach up with their hand for answers.
> Touching and searching they accomplish
> the task that sight cannot achieve . . .

Anyone who has ever been told that he has spinach in his teeth will recognize the experience Dante is talking about here, but I do not know that it had ever been used previously, nor have I seen it since, in European poetry. In the Paradiso, Dante tells how the souls in the sphere of the Sun circled him and then stopped, and he asks us to think of "ladies, poised to dance,/pausing, silent, as they listen,/until they have made out the new refrain." What a pretty sight that is: the ladies, in their party dresses, pausing together on the dance floor and waiting—we can see them cock their heads—to hear the new measure. They make the souls in the sphere of the Sun seem much more appealing.

But the most moving example is Dante's comparison of Beatrice, preparing to expound some truth, to a bird, at the end of the night, waiting for the sun to rise so that she can go off and gather food for her young:

> As the bird among the leafy branches that she loves,
> perched on the nest with her sweet brood
> all through the night . . .
>
> who in her longing to look upon their eyes and beaks
> and to find the food to nourish them—
> a task, though difficult, that gives her joy—
>
> now, on an open bough, anticipates that time
> and, in her ardent expectation of the sun,
> watches intently for the dawn to break . . .

I have forgotten the lesson that Beatrice gives us after this preamble, but I will not forget the mother bird, moving out on the branch (that is the crucial detail) so the leaves won't block her view of the sunrise.

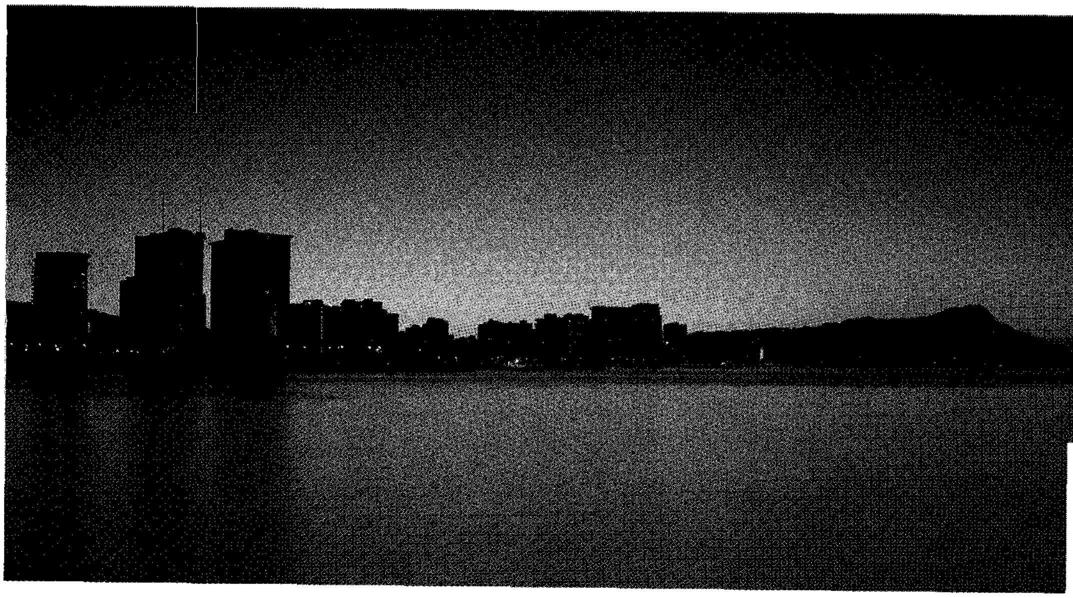
In the Paradiso, these probing metaphors seem to multiply, because of Dante's anxiety that we won't understand what he is telling us. Already in the opening lines, he said that what he saw in Heaven is impossible to describe. As he goes on, he makes the point again and again. He solves the problem, insofar as he can, by contriving what Dantists call "accommodative metaphors," metaphors in which, while saying that his meaning is incommunicable, he accommodates us by coming up with some sort of image. Examples can be found throughout the third canticle, often overlapping with the mental-process metaphors, and in them lies the pathos of the Paradiso. The souls in Heaven may not long for anything they don't have, but there is someone here who does: Dante, conscious at every moment that what he is producing in this poem is merely, as the veteran Dante scholar John Freccero put it, "a compromise short of silence." In the final canto, where the pilgrim arrives at the empyrean, the screws, needless to say, are tightened. If the lower spheres of Heaven were hard to describe, how is he going to tell us what it was like to look God in the face?

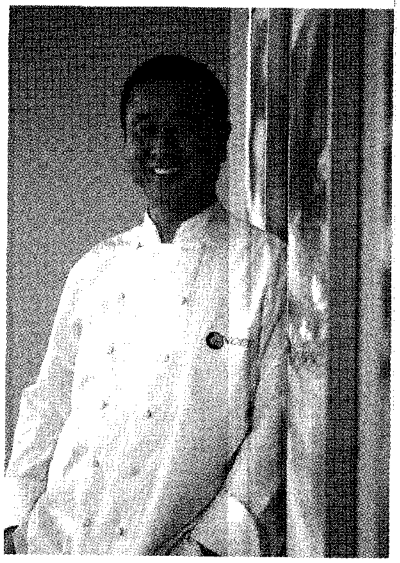
He opens by saying that the sight was so dazzling that he couldn't hold it in his memory. And immediately the accommodative metaphors begin: "Just as the dreamer, after he awakens,/still stirred by feelings that the dream evoked,/cannot bring the rest of it to mind," so is he. He will try, though. The vision, he recalls, was a very bright light, like the sun, but, unlike the sun, it didn't make you turn away. In fact, he couldn't stop looking at it, so much happiness did it give him. It made sense of the universe. To illustrate this, he gives us another accommodative metaphor—a personal one, about a book, the very thing that he is now finishing at his writing table in Ravenna. In the depths of the light, he saw "the pages scattered through the universe" now bound together, by love, into a single volume. We realize here, if we didn't before, that the person before us is no longer the pilgrim. It is the poet.

He goes on to another metaphor, a brief one, and perhaps the most stunning he ever made:

> My memory of that moment is more lost
> than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise
> when, in wonder, Neptune at the *Argo*'s shadow stared.
>
> Thus all my mind, absorbed,
> was gazing . . .

Never mind what the image has been brought in to describe. (Scholars are still arguing about that.) Focus only on the image. Jason and the Argonauts, in the first ship ever made, are sailing across the ocean on a dangerous mission, to capture the Golden Fleece. Neptune, the god of the ocean, looks up from the seafloor.





WAIKĪKĪ ON A ROLL

By John Heckathorn

Nobuyuki Matsuhisa began his culinary career sweeping the floors of a sushi bar in Tokyo's Shinjuku neighborhood. He later transformed himself into one of the world's most famous chef-restaurateurs—so famous that he needs only one name: Nobu. Since 1987, Nobu has opened restaurants from Malibu to Milan, Las Vegas to London, New York to Nassau.

"Many cities ask me to open a restaurant," he says. Just his presence adds cachet to a locale. A celebrity endorsement blurb on the book jacket of "Nobu: The Cookbook" reads, "You can tell how much fun a city is going to be if Nobu has a restaurant in it."

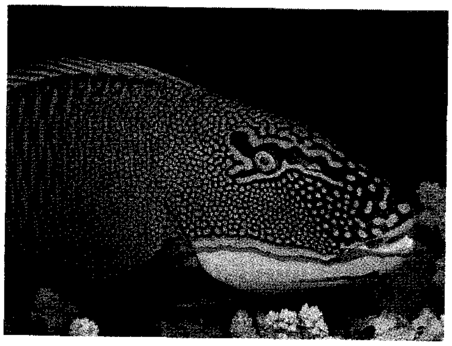
By that measure, Waikīkī has just become more fun. His stylish eatery, with its backlit onyx sushi bar, is not the only new restaurant in Waikīkī. *Nobu Waikiki* is surrounded by a host of new pedestrian-friendly developments that are consciously integrating Hawaiian cultural influences into their offerings. The area is drawing visitors and locals alike with a band of new dining, shopping, and entertainment activities in a fun, tropical, indoor-outdoor setting that is uniquely Waikīkī, and unmistakably Hawai'i.

In a yellow golf shirt and floral-print pants, Nobu sits at a back table in his newest locale. "I have a good feeling about this place," he says. "I am excited that *Nobu Waikiki* gets to be a part of the revitalization of Waikīkī." Nobu is no stranger to the Islands. For the past two decades, he has cooked alongside chefs from Hawai'i at food festivals and charity events. He has many friends here—chefs such as Sam Choy, Mark Ellman, Roy Yamaguchi, and Alan Wong. The last two have been recipients of the prestigious James Beard Award. All of these chefs are pioneers in Hawai'i Regional Cuisine, which, like Nobu's own creations, combines Asian and Western influences.

Nobu has a high regard for Hawai'i's culinary scene. "Food is a very important staple in any setting, and especially in Hawai'i, where local food reflects a mix of nationalities. I think my cuisine blends in perfectly." (Nobu, after all, is the one who slipped foie gras into his sushi and jalapeño peppers onto his sashimi.) He's looking forward to using the fish, justifiably famous, from Hawaiian waters and the produce from Hawai'i's rich, red volcanic soils. "I will be using local fish and produce as much as possible," he says.

For Nobu, Hawai'i is not just about food. He loves Hawai'i for its more than eighty golf courses and the opportunity to play year-round. "I have golfed on all the Islands," he says proudly. "Hawai'i is a good place to golf, then go to the beach, relax." He laughs at the irony: now that he has opened a restaurant here, he will have little time to sample all the diversions Waikīkī has to offer.

"Unfortunately, now I don't have time to do any of this," he says, "but cooking is my life and I love having my new restaurant here."



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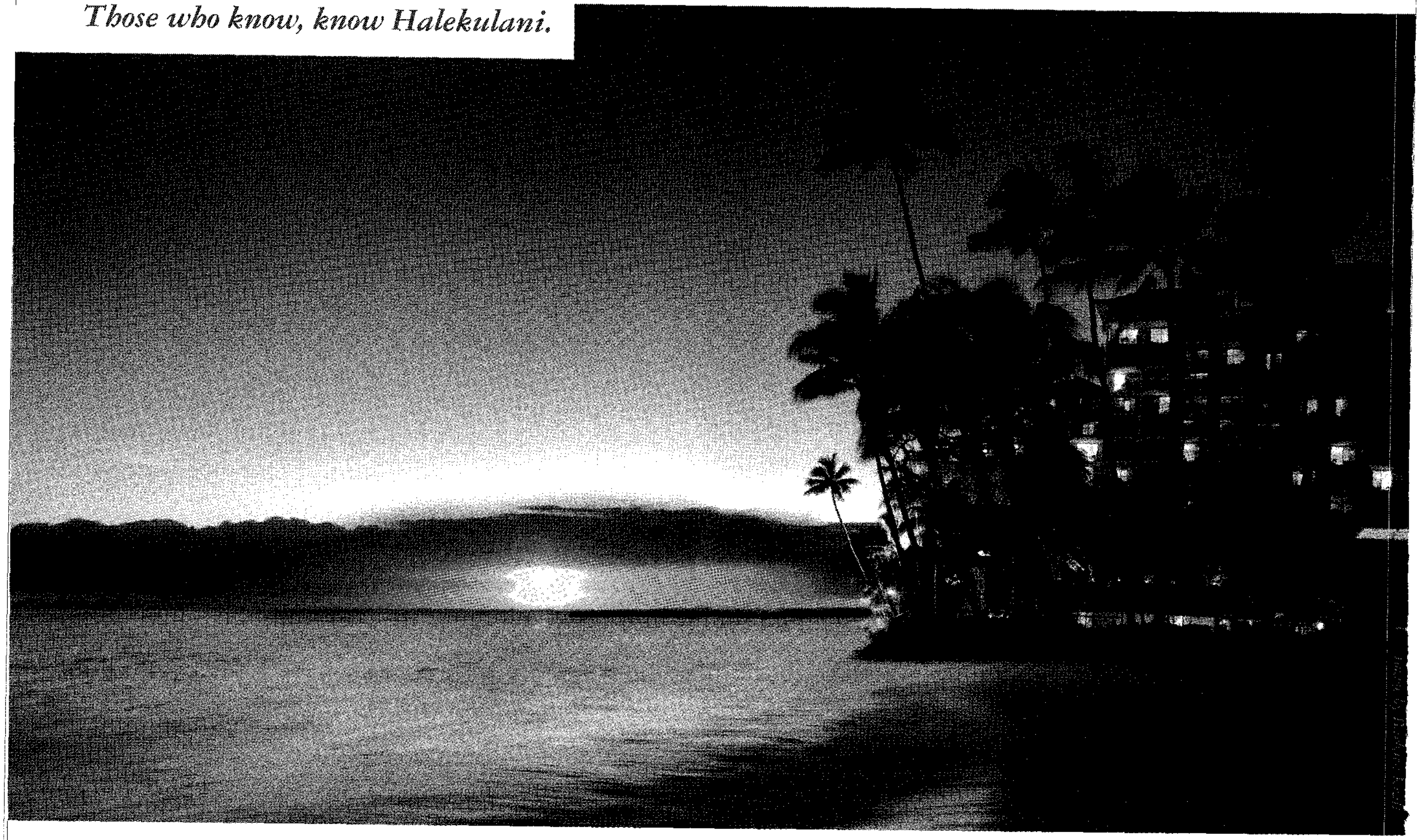
Those who know, know Halekulani.



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Through the fathomless depths, he sees a shadow—the boat—and stares at it in wonder. Though he is a god, he has never seen anything like this. Because of the context, we know that Dante is asking us to consider his amazement as he approaches the Godhead. But clearly something else, too, is going on here: Dante thinks *he* is cause for amazement. Like the Argo, the pilgrim is travelling across vast blue depths (Heaven) on a mission that no one has undertaken before. Similarly, no poet has ever made so ambitious a journey of the imagination as the Divine Comedy represents. Could Dante be suggesting that, like the ancient god seeing the little boat, the Christian God might be astonished to behold the poet's flight? Such a thought is blasphemous—God isn't surprised by anything, he foreordained it all—but Dante was an exceedingly confident artist. In any case, this may be the most wonderful act of wonder in Western poetry.

The poet now goes back to what he remembers of the Godhead. Within the great light he saw three superimposed circles, of different colors but of the same size. In nature, if the circles were of equal size you would see the color only of the topmost one. But we are not in nature, and no member of the Trinity is topmost, so the pilgrim sees all three simultaneously. This is a marvel. It is also, I think, something of a disappointment. Just three circles? After all that buildup? Dante suspects that he has fallen short. "O how scant is speech," he complains. Then, using his scant speech, he vaults higher and in three ecstatic lines, far more powerful than the vision of the circles, he knits together the whole self-enfolding miracle:

> O eternal Light, abiding in yourself
> alone,
> knowing yourself alone, and, known to
> yourself
> and knowing, loving and smiling on
> yourself!

Suddenly, he sees something in the circles: "*la nostra effige*," our likeness, a human face. This is Christ, who took on human form in order to save the world. But how does the human face fit into the circles? He can't figure it out, and as his final accommodative metaphor he refers us to a famous unsolvable problem in geometry: squaring a circle. You can't square a circle, he says, and neither could he have ever known how the human image found its relation to God—the very action that is now occurring in the poem, as the pilgrim faces the Godhead—if he hadn't suddenly been struck by a thunderbolt that gave him the answer. For that, he has no metaphor. All he can say is that it changed him:

> But now my will and my desire, like
> wheels revolving
> with an even motion, were turning with
> the Love that moves the sun and all the
> other stars.

His mind now moves in accordance with God's will. Like the Inferno and the Purgatorio, the Paradiso ends with the word "stars." Is the pilgrim still in Heaven, travelling among the heavenly bodies? I don't think so. He seems to be back on earth, gazing up at the distant lights. The three final lines are gentle in rhythm and imagery (wheels, "an even motion"). It's as if he were going to sleep. We feel like going to sleep, too, after such an experience.

Not all of the Paradiso is like that—not even most of it—but some of it is, and, in order to get to the end, you have to read the rest.

To help us through it, Robert Hollander has provided a set of notes for the Divine Comedy that, by my count, is almost thirty times as long as the text. Now, you do need notes in order to read this poem. Dante knew the Bible and Latin literature cold, and he referred to them constantly and elliptically, assuming that we, too, knew this material. Many of us don't, and therefore when Beatrice says that people shouldn't make rash vows—like "Jephthah, offering up what first he saw"—we need to be told that, in the eleventh chapter of Judges, Jephthah, a Hebrew raider, swore that if he was allowed to conquer the Ammonites he would offer up to God the first thing he saw coming out of his front door. After his victory, the first thing that came out of his front door was his daughter, his only child, whom he then piously put to death. That is a terrible story, and a good warning against hasty vows. To know it helps us appreciate the poem.

In Hollander's notes to this line, however, you get much more elaborate information. Hollander wants us to know that Dante is about to combine a Biblical story of daughter-killing with a classical one—Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia—and he tells us where else the poet

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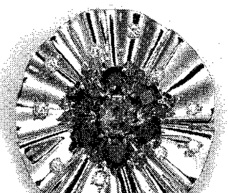

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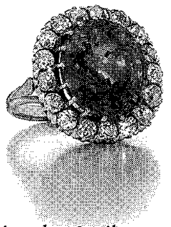

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offers such scriptural/classical pairings. He informs us that Virgil and Ovid told stories similar to Jephthah's, and he points us to where we can look them up. He tells us how many times (seven) the word "vow" is used in the three preceding cantos. He notes that the word *mancia*, or "offering," can also mean "assault." Respectful colleague that he is, he wouldn't say that without saying who first said it, "Bosco/Reggio (comm. to verse 66)," and what else they said, for example, that Aquinas also cited Jephthah. As for Iphigenia, Hollander narrates her story and adds that Dante conflated it with that of Jephthah's unfortunate child: "For Dante's transposition of the tears of Jephthah's daughter, weeping for her lost youth in the mountains of her sorrow (Judges 11:37-38), to Iphigenia's cheeks, see Torraca (comm. to vv. 70-72)." By the time you get through this, you've forgotten that you wanted to know what Jephthah's vow was.

Almost every line of the poem gets such treatment. Hollander's aim is to tell us everything Dante knew—above all, everything he read—that might have contributed to the composition of the Divine Comedy. He is also interested in Dante's word choices. He tells us when a word is a hapax (used only once in that canticle), or a triple hapax (used only once in each canticle of the Comedy), or an "absolute hapax" (used only once in Italian literature). He lets us know when Dante makes a mistake. (In the Paradiso, St. Peter Damian, who died in 1072, describes the cardinals of the Church as wearing red hats. Cardinals didn't get red hats until the thirteenth century.) He alerts us to the poet's departures from orthodoxy. When Beatrice says that in fulfilling a vow you can make substitutions but that the substitute has to be worth one-half again as much as the original offering, he quotes a scholar who pointed out in 1904 that Dante upped the price here: "In the Mosaic law, the increase of value was assessed at one-fifth; Dante raises it to one-half."

Dante was famous in his lifetime, and commentary on the Divine Comedy got going immediately after his death (in Ravenna, of malaria), in 1321. So we are looking at close to seven hundred years of scholarship. I don't know whether Hollander has cited every important contributor, but that's what it seems like. This department of the notes comes to be fun. It's as if all those scholars, ahistorically, were gathered in one room. Here is the excellent Scartazzini, whose ideas people steal. There is reliable old Tozer, whom Hollander calls in whenever he needs a difficult passage paraphrased. Here is up-to-date Durling, who thinks that Dante was gay. There is diligent Daniello—I imagine him with a big piece of paper—trying to work out the dimensions of the rose-shaped stadium where the souls of the blessed are seated in Dante's empyrean. Prudes speak up. (How could Dante have let St. Bernard, in his prayer to the Virgin, speak of her "womb"? Couldn't he have found a nicer word?) Bigots get their say. (Why are there more Jews than Christians in the empyrean?) National teams coalesce. American commentators, we are told, tend to be unbothered—and Italians bothered—by any heterodoxy in Dante's thinking. Fights break out: "Gabriele (comm. to verse 10) was perhaps the first to express some doubt about Lucan's observation; Lombardi spiked it through the heart." Sometimes Hollander tries to mediate among the disputants, but he, too, knows how to spike an interpretation through the heart. One scholar is said to have offered an "extravagant misreading"; another, a "numbbrained remark." Certain people seem to emerge as non-favorites. Nardi is repeatedly accused of error. So is Singleton, though at other times he is cited with a punctilious courtesy. (From the nineteen-seventies through the nineties, Charles S. Singleton's translation of the Divine Comedy, with copious commentary, occupied the market niche—advanced students—at which the Hollanders' volumes are aimed.) Hollander even quotes his students' papers. He retired from Princeton four years ago. These notes read like a valediction to his teaching career, and a summa of it.

A commentary such as this would seem too wide-ranging to offer a unified critical view of Dante, but Hollander does have such a view. Dante critics, he says, divide into two basic camps. One is the Romantics, who feel they can read the Comedy by their own lights, without taking account of its allegory, Benedetto Croce being a prime example. Opposing the Romantics are the scholars who try to see Dante's world as he did, and who therefore make their decisions about the poem in conformity with the allegory, Robert Hollander being a prime example. His career has been devoted to the explication and defense of Dante's allegory. People who ignore the theological substructure, he says, are likely to make terrible mistakes about the poem—for example, to feel sorry for the souls in Hell. Croce sees Ulysses as a hero, Hollander tells us, as have many (I would say most) readers since. Likewise, Croce and many other modern readers feel tenderly toward the adulteress Francesca da Rimini. As Hollander records with pain, some people even say that they like Francesca better than Beatrice. This is wrong, wrong, Hollander says, and in his notes he tries to show us how Dante made Francesca and Ulysses, in their narratives, reveal their unambiguous sinfulness. Ulysses, he claims, was a "con artist."

His argument for the allegory goes way beyond Ulysses and Francesca, however. It becomes an attitude to the whole Divine Comedy, an Olympian attitude. There is nothing disturbing in this poem, he seems to say—no problems, no tensions. Repeatedly, he all but admits that large tracts of the Paradiso are boring. He describes the canticle as "poeticized theology." He jokes about which canto readers find the most "labored and unwelcoming" (No. 2). But there are reasons for this, he argues, and for everything else that we might have objected to in the Paradiso. If Beatrice "sounds like a Doctor of the Church," that is "exactly as Dante wanted her to." If "there is no variety in Heaven," that is because variety is not "desired by the blessed." Nor will it be desired by you, he implies, once you read his notes.

In the end, Hollander comes to sound like one of the blessed. He wants nothing other than what he has. After four decades of teaching the Divine Comedy, he feels close to Dante. He likes God, too. (He asks us to think of Him looking down with love on His creation.) Indeed, he sometimes forgets that the Comedy is a work of fiction. When Dante gets to the empyrean and does not specify the seating plan in the rose stadium—Where do the Hebrew babies go? Where are the Christian babies? Are males and females separated, or is it co-ed?—he supplies nearly three pages of notes, listing the problems and the possible solutions. Seldom does he consider that, like most poems, the Divine Comedy has some loose ends.

Such blinkeredness extends to the very root of the pro-allegory position, which assumes that, seven centuries after the fact, we can say accurately what Dante's views were. While seeming historicist, this is actually ahistorical, in that it denies the historicity of all knowledge, the fact that what we think is always conditioned by our time. Furthermore, the insistence on our judging from Dante's point of view, while it aims at putting us closer to the poem, actually distances us from it, by telling us that our hearts and minds are not good enough to read the Divine Comedy. In the words of one critic, David Carne-Ross, it forces readers to come to the poem "in borrowed robes, fancy-dress medieval Christians," when, to have any sort of serious experience of it, they have to come as they are.

In short, Hollander's notes are not for the ordinary reader. They are for scholars and, above all, for graduate students, who are likely to share his preference for arcana over basic facts. In his luxuriant notes on Jephthah's vow, the one piece of information you can't find is the one you most need: what was Jephthah's vow? Caught up in Ovid and Virgil and Bosco/Reggio, Hollander forgets to tell us. Elsewhere, he actually disdains to supply the needed information. He thinks we know it.

Nevertheless, the Hollanders' translation is now the best on the market. So, if you want to read the Divine Comedy, get this version. Then spend another twenty-two dollars to buy John Ciardi's translation (Signet paperbacks)—good but not as good as the Hollanders'—and use it for its excellent, no-nonsense notes. Ciardi will tell you what Jephthah's vow was. In a few minor matters, his facts disagree with Hollander's, and Hollander is probably right, but who cares if a Pope whom Dante alludes to in passing is Boniface VIII (Ciardi) or John XXII (Hollander)?

Finally, don't expect to love every line. Apart from Beowulf, the Divine Comedy is probably the oldest poem of the Christian era that you will ever read. It is also the most ambitious poem ever written. In our lives, St. Paul said, we see though a glass darkly; later, we will see face to face. Dante tried to give us an idea of what that would be like. If it is sometimes hard to understand, this is no surprise. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Life Room, *by Jill Bialosky (Harcourt; $24).* Realizing just how dissatisfied she is with her outwardly flourishing life, Eleanor Cahn, a Columbia professor with a loving husband and two thoughtful, spirited sons, becomes entangled—sometimes in deed, sometimes just in thought—with the various archetypal men who she feels have defined her life. The premise of Bialosky's novel seems generic, but she uses this to advantage, highlighting symbolic and schematic elements to produce a study in self-examination that withholds emotional satisfaction from protagonist and reader alike, managing at once to frustrate and to entrance. One of Eleanor's ex-lovers says of his own novel, "It has no plot. It's about desire," and something similar is true of Bialosky's. She is adept at capturing the banality of desire and the patterns of contemporary lives that are "all angst with no transformation."

Consumption, *by Kevin Patterson (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $25).* In the early sixties, the "anachronistic malady" of tuberculosis haunts a small Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. A child is taken from her family for treatment in Montreal and returns six years later, forever marked as unique by her hunger for the outside world and the scars of a brutal surgery. Meanwhile, an influx of white men—and modernity—has estranged the natives from the land and the traditions that enabled them to survive there. Sweeping in scale but microscopic in its portrait of dislocated lives, this début novel finds its most compelling voice in the rueful meditations of a blundering, morphine-addicted American doctor, marooned by his own volition at the edge of the world. Patterson is a sure guide through inhospitable terrain, be it the "elastic, almost infinite emptiness" of the tundra or the far recesses of the soul.

CHEZ MARCEL

Circling My Mother, *by Mary Gordon (Pantheon; $24.)* In this unflinching memoir, Gordon, an acclaimed fiction writer, attempts to "walk around" her mother's life, "to view it from many points—only one of which was her career as my mother." She considers Anna Gordon as an employee (a lawyer's secretary for forty-five years, she supported first parents, then her own family), as a sibling and daughter (the child of an Italian-Irish immigrant marriage that produced nine offspring), as a devoted Catholic, and, finally, as a physical being, deformed from youth by polio and in her later years impaired by alcoholism and dementia. Gordon shows a piercing understanding of the way childhood slights and family squabbles reverberate through the generations. Although her aim is to create a thorough portrait of the woman who raised her, the book, arranged non-chronologically, draws shape and momentum from the fact that it is also a record of the author's insights into the forging of her own character.

Um . . ., *by Michael Erard (Pantheon; $24.95).* Fascinated by the media's "fetishized" portrayal of George W. Bush's malapropisms, Erard sets out to write "a work of applied blunderology" to explain how individuals acquire a particular verbal style, and why it matters when that style doesn't match listeners' expectations. The result is a historical catalogue of verbal gaffes, from spoonerisms and Freudian slips to "eggcorns"—wrong words, such as "pre-emptory," that sometimes make it into the linguistic mainstream. Erard finds evidence that before mechanical reproduction made it possible to focus on "aspects of the human voice that had once vanished in the air," people were less attuned to speech disfluencies and much more tolerant of ineloquence in their leaders. He writes that Thomas Jefferson, a notoriously poor public speaker who nonetheless enjoys a reputation as an "Enlightenment polymath," is lucky never to have been recorded.

ON TELEVISION

SCREWED UP

"Californication" and "Tell Me You Love Me."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The portmanteau title of the new Showtime series "Californication," in case you hadn't noticed, contains a reference to a certain act, an act that is performed by two parties, but the act that the show itself calls to mind is the solitary and less fruitful act of autoerotic asphyxiation: this is a show that loves itself to death. Created by Tom Kapinos, who was a writer and a producer on "Dawson's Creek" for a number of years, "Californication" follows the travails of a New York novelist turned Hollywood writer—Hello? You there? I thought I saw you nod off when I said "travails of a New York novelist turned Hollywood writer"—named Hank Moody. The problem is that Hank (David Duchovny) hasn't written anything since he moved to Los Angeles, because he feels sick to the bottom of his soul. I believe this sickness has something to do with that city's practice of using people until they're all used up and then spitting them out, not to mention its low standards and its black heart. Hank's novel "God Hates Us All," a sturm-und-dranger, has been turned into a romantic comedy called "A Crazy Little Thing Called Love"; ads and posters featuring its stars, Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, seem to mock Hank as he moves through his days, unshaved and unemployed, except for his couplings with pretty much any woman he comes into contact with. Hank is in pain—he's separated from his longtime partner, Karen (Natascha McElhone), and doesn't get to see their twelve-year-old daughter, Becca (Madeleine Martin), as much as he'd like. Karen finally ran out of patience with his balkiness about marriage, left him, and is now engaged to a stiff named Bill (Damian Young, who was just as wooden as Lisa Kudrow's husband in "The Comeback").

"Californication" wants to have it all. It wants to be a comedy; a fist shaking at the depredations of the Hollywood machine (Kapinos has said that between "Dawson's Creek" and "Californication" he wrote a handful of pilots that ended up going nowhere); a satire of same; and a heartstring-tugging family drama. The last would require us to care terribly whether Hank and Karen end up back together, with the family intact once again. The strange thing is that the family already seems intact: Karen is clearly still in love with Hank—either that or she has had her face surgically altered into a permasmile. Whenever he shows up, and despite the fact that he says rude things to her fiancé, Karen gives him adoring looks and laughs at his jokes (which *are* funny), as if he and she were still courting. But what's most puzzling about "Californication" is that much of the time it resembles a soft-porn film, in the sense that there isn't just nudity and sex but a particular kind of nudity and sex, shot in a particular way, aimed at a particular audience: girl invariably on top, man below keeping hands more or less to himself, in order to give the ta-ta cam maximum access. This kind of cheesiness is all about what the camera sees, rather than about the story and what the characters are feeling. (You can't help remembering that Duchovny's first TV series was the whisper-soft-porn show "Red Shoe Diaries.") Twice in the first two episodes, women, for no reason, disrobe and ask Hank to evaluate their bodies.

A lecher in lotusland: David Duchovny as a bad-boy writer in L.A.

PABLO LOBATO

It's true that Hank is supposed to be cheesy; not using his "incredible talent," as Karen calls it, has made him sloppy and stupid. But at the same time we're meant to think that he's basically a good guy. After all, the object of his fantasy life is none other than his ex. And several episodes end with him thinking deep, wistful thoughts about his daughter. (Becca, with thick, precisely cut black bangs and gigantic eyes, has an inexplicably freakish personality; the over-all impression she gives is of a combination of space alien, Wednesday Addams, and the twin girls who were photographed by Diane Arbus.)

The thing is, Hank *is* a good guy. Of course he is—he's played by David Duchovny, the charmingest of men. (Duchovny is also an executive producer of the series, along with Kapinos.) He has built his reputation for charm and wit and droll self-deprecation as much on his hugely entertaining talk-show appearances—and his appearances on HBO's "The Larry Sanders Show"—as he has on his acting, and we're primed to like him. He doesn't have much range as an actor, but with his intelligence and that glint in his eye he's as starrily attractive as they come. During Duchovny's "X-Files" heyday, a songwriter named Bree Sharp wrote a sweet and hilarious ballad sending up his popularity and his charisma: "American Heathcliff, brooding and comely, David Duchovny, why won't you love me?" But even charisma has limits, and Duchovny's perfume can't mask the unpleasant odor that emanates from "Californication."

There's a Sunday-night HBO drama series débuting on September 9th that's unlike anything that's ever been on television. "Tell Me You Love Me," created by Cynthia Mort, goes deep into the intimate lives of four couples, three of whom are in couples therapy with the same therapist—who's played by Jane Alexander, the female half of the fourth couple. What's different about "Tell Me" is that it sticks around after other dramas fade out—that is, in scenes where the traditional dénouement would be a fadeout that implies sex, the cameras keep rolling, and there we are, suddenly in virgin territory, so to speak, watching fictional couples go all the way. The show breaks new ground when it comes to explicitness, though with all the advance talk out there about how much flesh is onscreen in "Tell Me," and to what uses that flesh is put, it has to be said that there is a lot you don't see; there's still some room for future shock in depictions of sex on TV.

"Tell Me" has its flaws, but it's very watchable (and not merely because it's arousing); its aim is to show you what committed relationships feel like, and how they work, and how strange and fragile and complicated they are. And, despite the fact that there are frequent therapy sessions, the show isn't talky when it comes to sexual issues. There's a creative clarity about the series: Mort is also an executive producer and the main writer, and you're willing to go where she takes you, even if you find that one or two of the characters aren't worth your attention, as I did. You get to know the couples' marriages so well that you become invested in their problems; one couple, devoted upper-middle-class parents of elementary-school-age children, have become like sleepover buddies; they haven't had sex for almost a year, and can't find their way back to each other. It's to the show's credit that, as you watch these two aching people not have sex, week after week, you begin to feel that you're invading their privacy. ♦

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POP MUSIC

TRAVELLING MAN

Manu Chao's polyglot pop.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

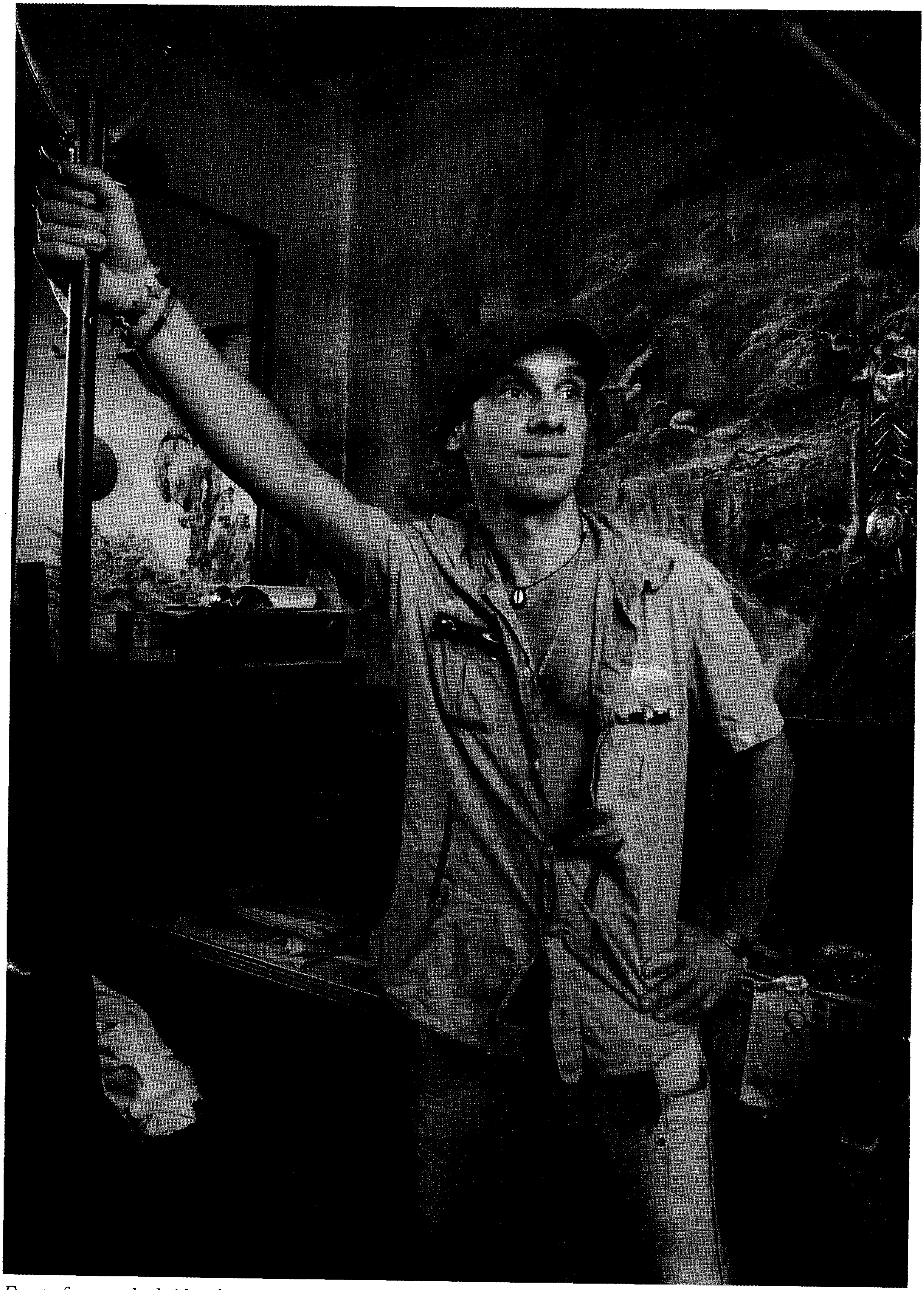
Toward the end of a live show, weary musicians often appeal to the audience with a stock phrase intended to invigorate the proceedings: "How is everyone feeling tonight?" "I can't hear you!" "Cleveland, make some noise!" Manu Chao, a wiry forty-six-year-old of Spanish extraction who grew up in Paris, used a different tactic when he played the first of two sold-out shows in Brooklyn's Prospect Park in June. He shouted out the names of countries, and people cheered, often in reverse proportion to the nation's population: "Uruguay!" Some whoops. "Costa Rica!" Roars. "Macedonia!" Total mayhem.

Few pop performers take the idea of being a global musician so literally. Chao's new album, "La Radiolina," consists of twenty-two tracks in five languages, including English, which he learned as a teen-ager by listening to Lou Reed songs and reading crime novels by the African-American writer Chester Himes, who moved to France in the nineteen-fifties. Chao maintains apartments in Paris and Barcelona, and spends part of each year in Fortaleza, a town in northern Brazil, where his eight-year-old son lives. He is completing an album of songs in Portañol (a hybrid of Spanish and Portuguese) and collaborating on another, with patients in a psychiatric hospital in Buenos Aires. He also produced—and co-wrote some of the tracks on—"Dimanche à Bamako," an album featuring the blind Malian couple Amadou and Mariam, which was one of the most assured and finely detailed releases of 2005. And, in 2004, he released an all-French CD of songs about Paris enclosed in a book containing primary-color illustrations by Jacek Woźniak—a project apparently intended for younger listeners still in need of conversion.

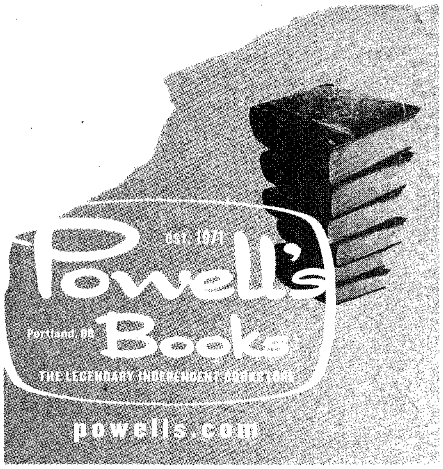
Many French had already converted to Chao by 1998, when he released "Clandestino," his début album. His band, Mano Negra, had established a healthy following in France during its nine-year run, between 1986 and 1995, with a sound that was hard and hyperactive—a blend of rock, funk, and reggae heavily indebted to left-leaning punk bands and that strain of overemphatic ska which has become the default music for skaters and dreadlocked dissenters all over the world. Mano Negra made several passable records of a vaguely political nature.

On "Clandestino," Chao abandoned this well-meaning rumpus for a more precise sound, using a handful of guitars, percussion instruments, and unidentifiable noisemakers to tell stories. His politics hadn't changed—the title track is a lament from the perspective of a worker "without papers," and "Welcome to Tijuana" is a sarcastic celebration of Mexico's sex-and-drugs tourism—but his music had. Listeners who might not endorse Chao's critique of globalization or his efforts to organize youth in the *banlieues* could mentally file the easygoing twinkle of the guitars and the hand percussion on "Clandestino" next to the unthreatening serenades on a Gipsy Kings CD. The album contains tracks in English, French, and Spanish, which means that some are likely to register—at least with American fans—as merely embellished instrumental music. Imagine his agitating lyrics being played over the speakers at an upscale restaurant and only the busboys being able to understand them. How do you become more than an appealing novelty if the diners don't realize that you're calling them out?

For his second album, the 2001 masterpiece "Próxima Estación: Esperanza" ("Next Station: Hope")—the title was inspired by an announcement that Chao heard while riding the subway in Madrid—he and his producer, Renaud Letang, exploited the musical possibilities of the recording studio more fully. Chao often cites the Clash and Bob Marley as influences; like Marley, he writes songs that work equally well whether they are played by a full band or by a single guitarist. As a singer, though, Chao doesn't have Joe Strummer's declamatory oomph or



Few performers take the idea of being a global musician so literally. Photograph by Baerbel Schmidt.



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Marley's gift for extended, glowing incantations. His voice rests in the high midrange, and his delivery consists mostly of bar-band-style hollers. (Chao busked in Paris for years, and he still plays regularly in bars near his home in Barcelona.) On "Esperanza," Chao's economical sound was supplemented with electronic hoots, muted horns, and random snippets of radio broadcasts and conversations, suggesting a recording session that began on a subway platform and ended at a bar. The music perfectly embodies Chao's hearty populism and itinerant nature—always in the street, always moving, always inviting people in.

At Prospect Park, Chao wore a green fatigue shirt, open to the waist; short white cargo pants; white sneakers; and, around his head, a long scarf of red, green, yellow, and black. He appeared with his five-piece backing band, Radio Bemba Sound System, and the mood was celebratory verging on frantic. Two of the band's members were shirtless and not exactly in shape for the beach, but all—save the drummer, who was seated—spent a fair amount of time jumping up and down. Such is the beauty and limitation of Chao's shows. Each song quickly revs up into a double-time punk beat that sounds an awful lot like a polka, which is great for creating a feeling of sweaty solidarity in the audience and encouraging dance- and sing-alongs. After the first four or five sets of jumping jacks, though, monotony begins to undermine the band's charm.

"La Radiolina" splits the difference between Chao's performances and his studio records. The album is Chao's most direct yet, presenting him as a sincere man motivated equally by affection and quiet fury. There are some lovely sonic turns—the guitars and horns have been recorded with unusual fidelity—but the emphasis is on Chao's singing: in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and French, as well as in English. Some of the most personal songs are upbeat and aggressive, while the one overtly political track, "Politik Kills," is subdued. Chao told me recently that he writes songs as "therapy, to address the rage I feel about this world," but on the whole he is too smart simply to telegraph his feelings and theories.

In "13 Días," the album's opening number, acoustic guitars chatter in double time as an electric guitar executes quick, flat-picking runs borrowed from a honky-tonk tune. The music is a kind of Latin country punk, though the song is not the call to arms it initially seems to be. The lyrics (in Spanish) are about longing, not revolution: "Thirteen days that I did not see you, thirteen days without meaning, thirteen days outside of you, thirteen days to forget." As in almost every other track on the album, the words are sung by several voices at once, usually Chao's, which gives the song emotional heft and makes it seem less like the expression of a single ego than like the cry of an entire group.

"Politik Kills" is a reworked version of a song from "Dimanche à Bamako." Guitars pulse quietly, in a modified reggae skank; the only percussion is a modest tambourine. Chao, chanting in English, delivers a series of simple equations: "Politik use drugs, politik use bombs, politik need torpedoes, politik needs blood. That's why, my friend, it's an evidence—politik is violence." As he sings, the sound of a trombone playing an improvised line bleeds through his words, and later a saxophone does the same. In the original version, the lyrics are almost ornamental; here, Chao foregrounds them calmly and deliberately, as if he were talking to those of us who live thousands of miles from armed conflict and think that politics is something that happens only in the presence of elected officials. The song would be less startling if Chao sang twice as loud. On his records, he rarely hectors.

The album's highlight is "Me Llaman Calle," which originally appeared in the 2005 Spanish film "Princesas," about a pair of prostitutes in Madrid. The song begins with fast handclaps followed by an acoustic guitar vigorously strumming a flamenco rhythm and then two more guitars improvising arpeggiated chords. Chao, forgoing the shouting, provides a supple melody and verses that alternately convey despair ("Today I am so empty, like a little machine in the great city") and hope ("One day, on the way out, a good man will come to find me, for the rest of life, and without paying—my heart is not for rent"). The chorus, though, is more traditional Chao: he repeats the phrase "*me llaman calle*" ("they call me street"), introducing subtle variations. The words well up joyfully, despite the song's clear implication that living on the street is not something to romanticize. It's just what people all over the world do every day, and it's for these people that Chao is singing. ♦

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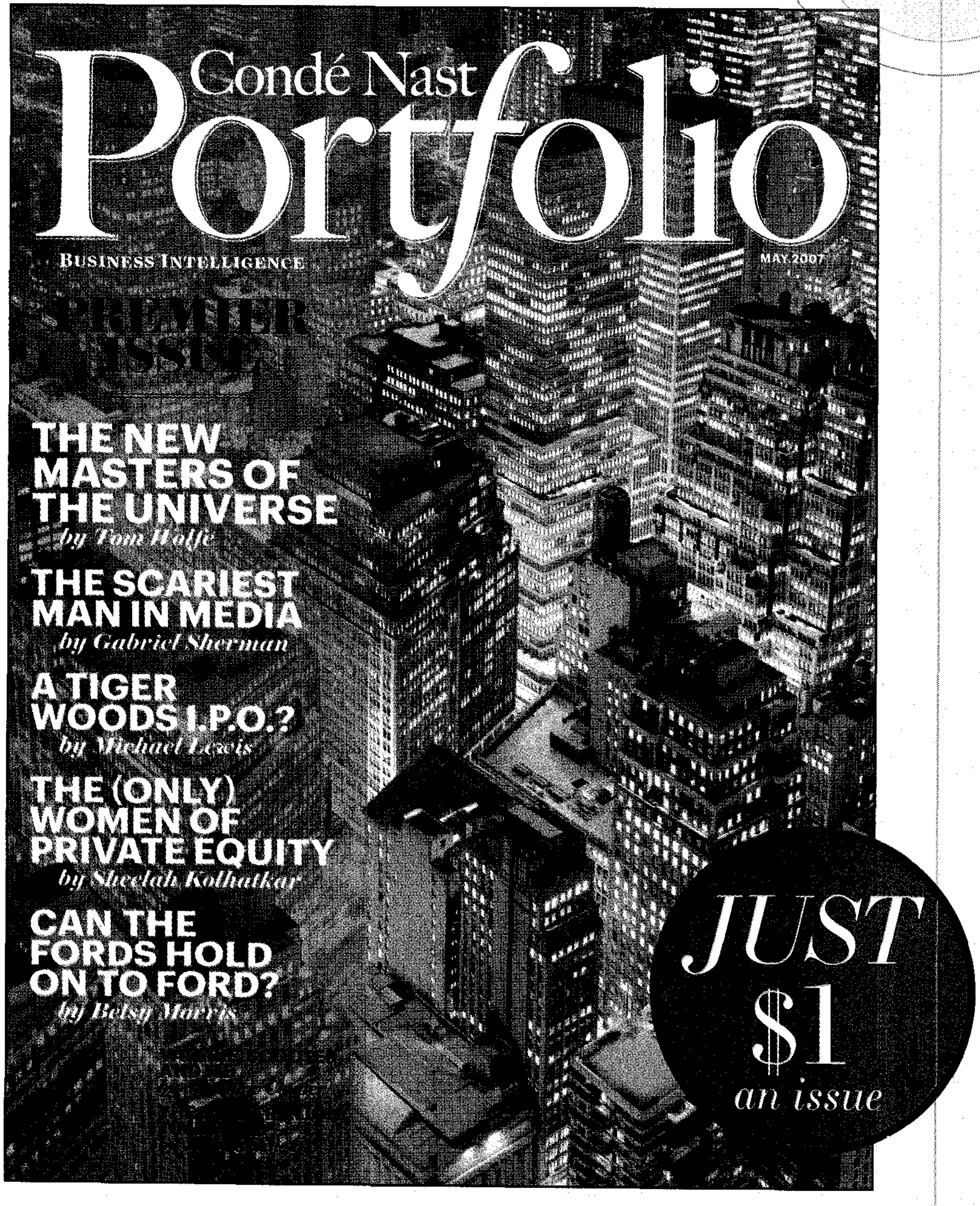
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THE THEATRE

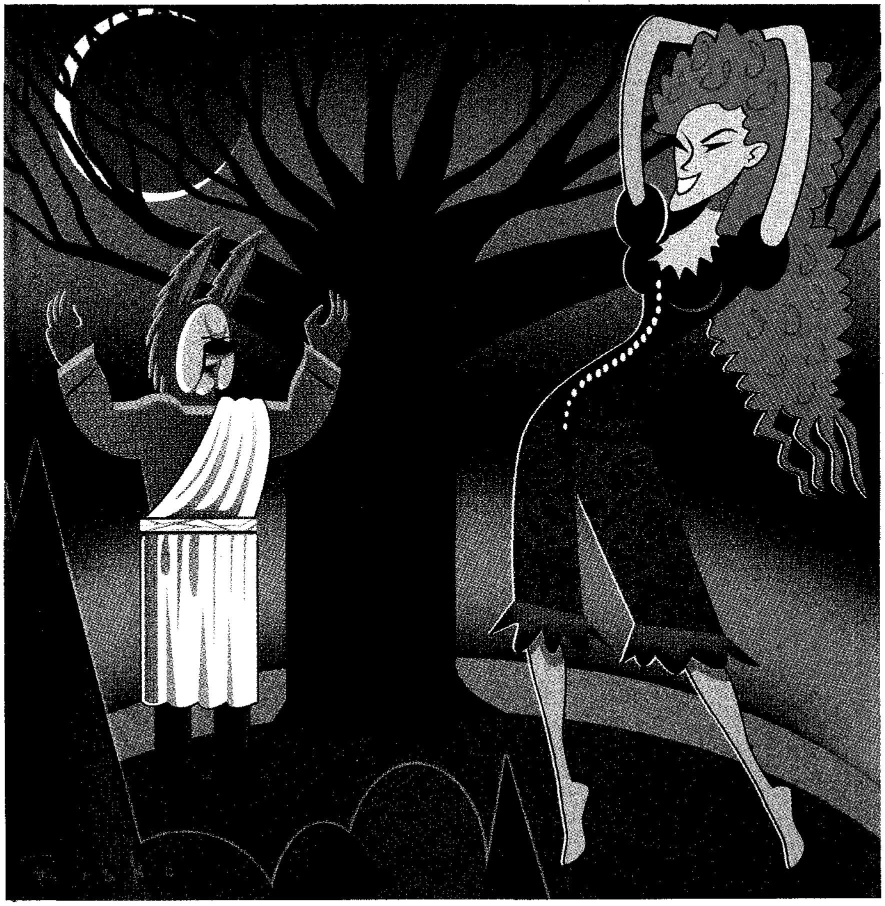
GREEK TO ME

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Iphigenia 2.0."

BY HILTON ALS

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" (a Public Theatre production, at the Delacorte, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan) is a sort of burlesque without the nudity, a celebration of the vulgarity endemic to show business and of the performer's need to show off. (The late Gypsy Rose Lee would have made a sensational Titania, Queen of the Fairies, resplendent in pasties and a crown.) One of Shakespeare's first major comedies, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a fast locomotive, piled high with supple young bodies and wit, a farce about the lengths to which we will go in order to be seen and held by others who may not want to see or hold us.

The play's one constant is nature. The moonlight is clear and bright, compared with "Midsummer"'s alternately besotted and hysterical lovers, for whom the moon and the stars are little more than handy metaphors for their all-too-human self-interest. Even as, compelled by the forces of nature and magic, Demetrius (Elliot Villar) chases Hermia (the lovely-voiced Mireille Enos), and Lysander (Austin Lysy) falls in love with Helena (the astonishing Martha Plimpton), the temporarily mismatched lovers either ignore or express their irritation with the elements that house them. These four and the other members of the ménage end up outdoors on the slightest pretext: Hermia's father, Egeus (George Morfogen), disapproves of his daughter's wish to marry sweet, earnest Lysander, so they flee Athens. Meanwhile, Helena, a friend


ROBERT RISKO

Laila Robins as Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

of Hermia's, is pursuing Demetrius, who is the kind of romantic who refuses to settle for anything less than the purest love.

Helena, on the other hand, *is* nature, a whirlwind who longs to share the pleasures of her flesh, even though the more civilized—which is to say, more repressed—members of her troupe repel her advances. As played by Plimpton—who, in the past few seasons, has given indelible performances in plays ranging from Conor McPherson's "Shining City" to Tom Stoppard's "The Coast of Utopia"—Helena is a spectacle unto herself, full-blooded and alive. Plimpton's physical and verbal pyrotechnics, it turns out, are precisely what's missing from the fairies who populate the play's usually thrilling alternate universe.

Watching Jon Michael Hill play Puck, you pose a number of questions: Why is the diminutive actor dressed to resemble a bat (in a way that evokes Ben Vereen in "Pippin")? And why, when he communicates with the First Fairy (Chelsea Bacon), does he remind you of the choreographer Bob Fosse's marvellously odious gyrations as the Snake in the 1974 film of "The Little Prince"? It's as if Sullivan—a busy but undistinguished director—had decided to leave everything up to Shakespeare's dialogue and refrained from actually directing the characters who inhabit "Midsummer" 's spirit world. Dressed badly, by Ann Hould-Ward, and sporting even worse makeup (Keith David's partly silver face, as he plays Oberon, reminds one of the mask from "The Phantom of the Opera"), Sullivan's fairies look like escapees from an Edward Gorey drawing. They fare no better in their performances. David sits dully, seemingly awaiting his next cue, while Laila Robins, as Titania, is a forced, strident presence, who seems incapable of loving anyone but herself.

Like David, we wait for the fairy scenes to end, if only so that we can get back to Plimpton, who is nicely partnered by Villar, a fine young actor, who was exceptional in Tarell Alvin McCraney's "The Brothers Size," at the Public earlier this year. Together, these two rescue us from the tedium of this production, which, for the most part, undermines the beauty of the text. Harold Bloom, in his 1998 study "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human," notes that he has seen few productions of "Midsummer" that were equal to the text. I had expected the actors assembled here to do better.

Charles Mee, whose plays are the focus of the Signature Theatre Company's current season, works in what might best be described as the postmodern style; that is, his texts are not "original"—stories that he dreams up himself—but, rather, classics that he uses for his own purposes. Like the great British poet Christopher Logue, Mee finds much of his inspiration in ancient Greece: Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, is clearly a paternal presence in Mee's "Iphigenia 2.0" (at the Peter Norton Space). But one can tell that Mee is equally excited by the works of the director Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group, and of the German choreographer Pina Bausch. Like them, he adapts historical texts to reflect the world as it is now: a fragmented place, torn apart by war, by the disintegration of the family, and by politicians who offer a canned performance of authority while disavowing all responsibility.

"Iphigenia 2.0" takes place in Greece, but it's less like the Greece of the Persian wars than like present-day Iraq and Afghanistan. Four soldiers (the excellent J. D. Goldblatt, Jesse Hooker, Jimonn Cole, and Will Fowler) act as a chorus in fatigues, listening as Agamemnon (Tom Nelis) contemplates sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia (Louisa Krause), to the gods in order to make peace with his people. Divided between his emotions—love for his child—and his duties as a leader, Mee's Agamemnon is not unlike Mee the playwright struggling both to pay homage to the past and to create something new.

You'd think, given the meddlesome activities of his wife, Clytemnestra (Kate Mulgrew), that Agamemnon would unravel more quickly than he does during the play's ninety minutes. But Mee shows Clytemnestra's self-involvement to be just her way of remaining faithful to her own fate. As we wait for the play's inevitable conclusion, the director, Tina Landau, populates the sparsely decorated stage with younger characters, who dance to display either their machismo or, as in the case of Iphigenia's bridesmaids, a shrieking femininity. Here Mee takes to task our notions of gender, as well as the tendency in popular theatre to view characters not as complicated beings but as cardboard props. ♦

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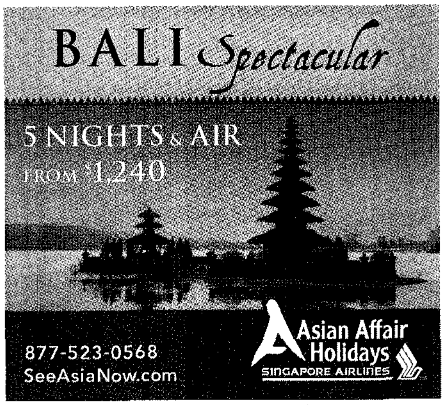
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THE CURRENT CINEMA

EASTERN, WESTERN

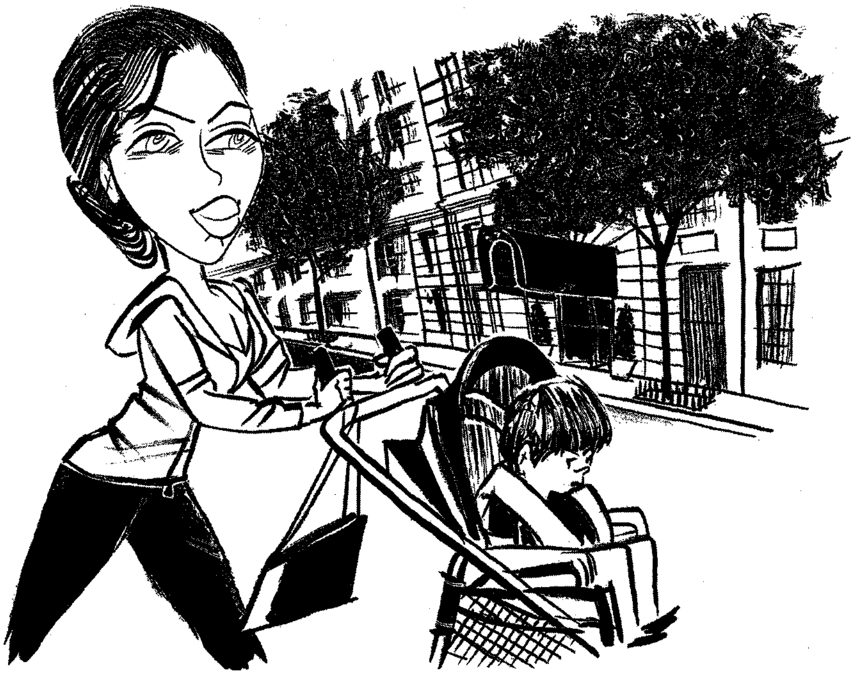
“The Nanny Diaries” and “3:10 to Yuma.”

BY DAVID DENBY

In the 2002 best-seller “The Nanny Diaries,” the N.Y.U. graduates Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin, who had spent some time taking care of children on the Upper East Side, pooled their anecdotes, merged into a single voice, and compiled a fiction about a young nanny’s suffering at the hands of a tyrannical Park Avenue couple. The book was both a cry of exasperation and an attack on the fatuity of wealth. Near the beginning, the heroine walks into a room and encounters what she calls “the full range of Upper East Side diversity—half the women are dressed in Chanel suits and Manolo Blahniks, half are in six-hundred-dollar barn jackets, looking as if they might be asked to pitch an Aquascutum tent at any moment.” This is clever, I suppose, yet the list of boutique products suggests that the heroine has pretty much the same values as the women she’s teasing, without having anything like their money. Parts of “The Nanny Diaries” read like a peculiarly self-pitying and envious piece of magazine journalism in which the upscale knowingness of the victim serves only to fuel her outrage over how badly she’s being treated. The book, more snark than satire, provides eager glimpses of emotional squalor and lousy parenting among the super-rich; it seems to be written for people who want to feel superior to the swells whose goods they in fact covet.

The talented writer-director team of Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini (“American Splendor”), who did the movie adaptation, obviously realized that they had to change the disingenuous point of view. They have turned the nanny—or, as she’s called by her boss, “Nanny” (Scarlett Johansson)—into a New Jersey girl whose mother is a hard-working nurse. She is now a genuine outsider. And they’ve created a sprightly new voice for her. She studied anthropology in college, and she narrates a mock field report in which she examines, among other exotic creatures and tribes, a specimen known as Upper East Side Natives. We see these strange people at the Museum of Natural History, standing behind glass, in a diorama. Blond, stiff, and lean, they appear to be yearning for some ideal Nantucket of the mind. Propelled by such debonair flourishes, the movie takes off nicely. The enormous East Side apartment in which Nanny works has a slightly exaggerated gleam, as if the glass and porcelain had been created in a diamond mine. The adulterous dad, known only as Mr. X (Paul Giamatti), may be a caricature of boredom and moneyed contempt, but, as Mrs. X, Laura Linney finds something both scary and touching in the situation of a woman frightened of her own needy little boy and desperate to please her vile husband. We wait for some sort of commanding narrative to take hold.

Alas, none does. “The Nanny Diaries,” despite many bright moments and a superior level of craftsmanship, is now a flabby urban fairy tale. Nanny is treated like an indentured servant by Mrs. X, and when a handsome young man in the building—Harvard Hottie (Chris Evans), he’s called—advises her to quit her job, and she doesn’t, the movie’s senselessness becomes obvious. She tells Harvard Hottie that she has fallen in love with the family’s little boy, Grayer (Nicholas Reese Art), who needs her. But Nicholas Reese Art, a towhead with leather lungs and a face like a closed fist, is not a likable child—he has no personality at all—and Scarlett Johansson, trying to give the material a plausible emotional center, looks merely confused. At some level, Pulcini and Springer Berman must know that a white, college-educated nanny with many career opportunities is not a character who can legitimately generate much pathos, because suddenly, out of nowhere, they throw in a scene in which an African and two Latino nannies turn to the camera and complain (rightly) that they are trapped in their jobs. Nanny is trapped only by the falsity of the plot. The material has been turned into a trivially narcissistic product for teen-age girls who want to feel indignant about wrongs they are unlikely to suffer. Mrs. X, a kind of wicked stepmother, won't let Nanny see her young man. But Harvard Hottie, a prince in a college workout shirt, outsmarts the boss. He pursues Nanny anyway and won't take no for an answer.



Scarlett Johansson plays Nanny in the movie version of the best-seller.

TOM BACHTELL

At the bloody end of "3:10 to Yuma," virtually all the surviving characters, not to mention a variety of strangers, get shot at point-blank range. It's almost as if the stage were being cleared for some subsequent installment of what we've just been watching—the eternal conflict of good and evil in the Old West. There haven't been many big-screen Westerns recently, but the form has lost none of its slightly absurd solemnity. It hasn't lost its physical beauty, either, or its fervent seriousness about honor and courage. "3:10 to Yuma" is a remake of a 1957 Western directed by Delmer Daves, and this version—directed by James Mangold and written by Michael Brandt and Derek Haas, who amplified Elmore Leonard's 1953 story and Halsted Welles's script for the original—is faster, more cynical, and more brutal than the first. The setting is the Arizona territory after the Civil War, a wilderness with towns so ragged and insubstantial that they seem merely scratched onto the surface of the desert. Vengeful Apaches keep travellers awake at night, and Chinese coolies, working for the Southern Pacific Railroad, lay track across the mountains. Nothing resembling a social structure exists; individual character, for good or for ill, is all there is. In minor roles, the actors loom up at a saloon window or sit heavily on horseback, and each anonymous face, carved by terrible food, rotten liquor, and bad sex, makes an overwhelming impression of loneliness and discomfort. Peter Fonda, who is always described by publicists as an "icon," shows up as a corrupt and violent bounty hunter—a thug with authority—and gives an amazingly fierce performance. In this movie, Fonda really is iconic. "3:10 to Yuma" may be familiar, but, at its best, it has a rapt quality, even an aura of wonder.

The hero, Dan Evans (Christian Bale), is a Civil War veteran with a stump for a foot; he has come out from Massachusetts with his family, and holds a few acres of parched ground, but he finds himself stranded in a moral wasteland. His barn gets burned down by a powerful man who wants him to clear off, and, in the hills near his property, he runs into the notorious outlaw and murderer Ben Wade (Russell Crowe). When they meet

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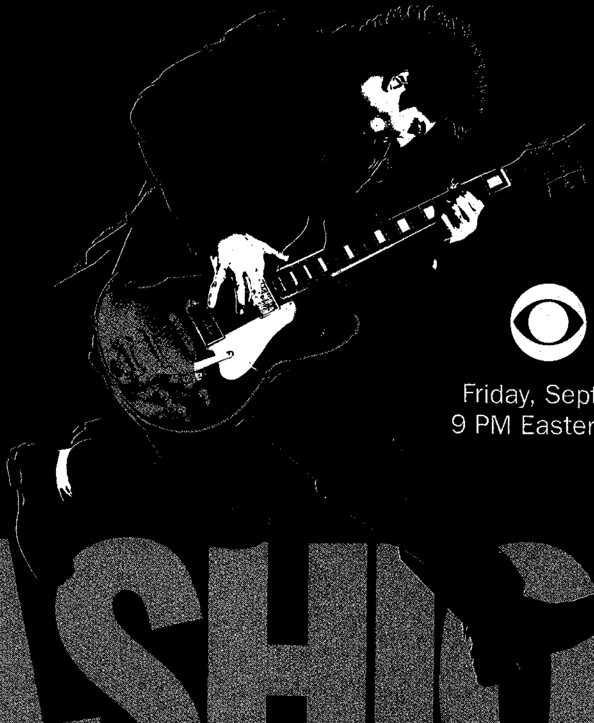

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again in town, in a dark saloon, a bizarre thing happens: Wade finds the virtuous Dan so interesting that he lets his guard down. Pinkertons working for the railroad enter the building and capture him, and Dan, dead broke, becomes part of a group being paid good money to convey the famous killer across the desert and deposit him in a train heading for prison. During the journey, Wade murders two of his captors, and he makes a prolonged attempt to reason or bully Dan into letting him go. The stolid rancher has a moral core that provokes him—he can't fathom it and wants to destroy it.

Most of this might have been little more than a heavyweight conceit were it not for Russell Crowe. Within minutes of his first appearance, he convinces you that Ben Wade is the most intelligent man in the territory. Wade is accompanied by a band of killers, including a dandified acolyte in buckskins (the gifted Ben Foster) who is fanatically loyal to him, and Crowe separates himself from Foster and the other actors, creating a quiet private space in which he can play. This cultivated gangster likes to observe other people; he draws pictures of anyone who interests him and quotes Biblical verse—he's an aesthete and an ironist—and Crowe, dominating every situation with a violent lunge or a vicious remark, gives a fascinating, self-amused performance (I was reminded of Marlon Brando at his most perverse). Crowe is an acting genius, and the filmmakers build him up—they create a chaotic milieu in which Wade's nihilism comes off as a particularly nasty form of survivor's wisdom. In the Arizona territory, there's no law to speak of; the Southern Pacific corrupts everyone, buying whatever "justice" it needs to conduct its business. Dan turns out to be the only one foolish enough to finish the job and bring the bad guy to prison. His defense of a civilization that doesn't yet exist is an expression of personal honor, and it's so ornery and irrational that it moves even Ben Wade.

James Mangold's movies include "Cop Land" (1997), "Girl, Interrupted" (1999), and "Walk the Line" (2005), and this is by far his most sustained and evocative work. A scene in which Wade's gang robs a stagecoach has a convulsive violence that makes it one of the best versions of this generic episode ever filmed. Mangold draws out the tensions between the actors—between Crowe and Fonda, for instance—and when the violence explodes it's startling. There are a few choppy moments—an Indian attack at night is more suggested than staged—and I wish Mangold had resisted digital enhancement in a scene in which Wade and Dan blow up a railway tunnel (the moment looks fake). But much of this Western is tense and intricately wrought, and I found myself settling into its stern logic and its physical splendor with a grateful sigh. The old rituals are so far removed from our glib media world that they seem as solid as the hills and boulders of Arizona itself. ♦

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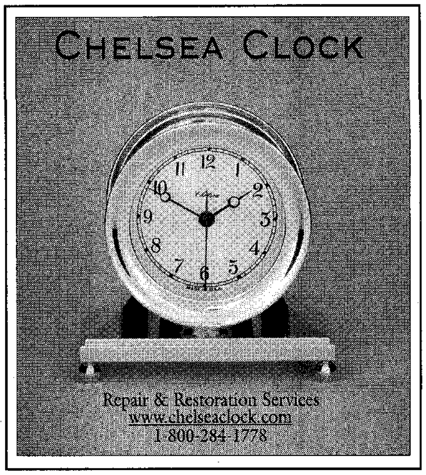

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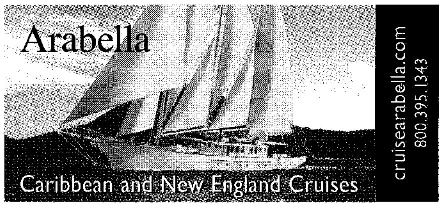

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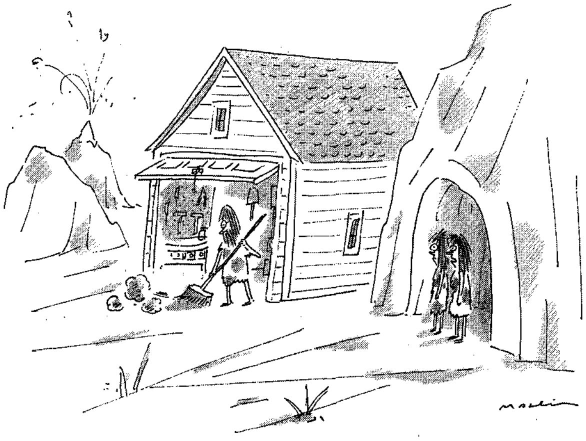
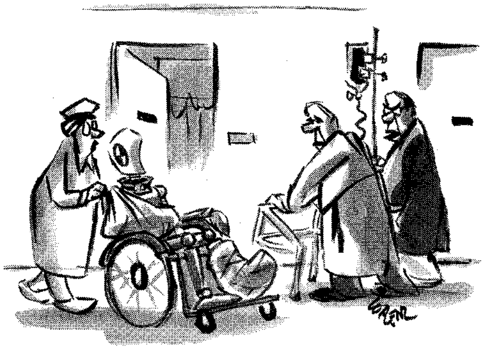
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, September 9th. Finalists in the August 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 24th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"He's always thinking outside the rock."
Jonathan Williams, Owings Mills, Md.



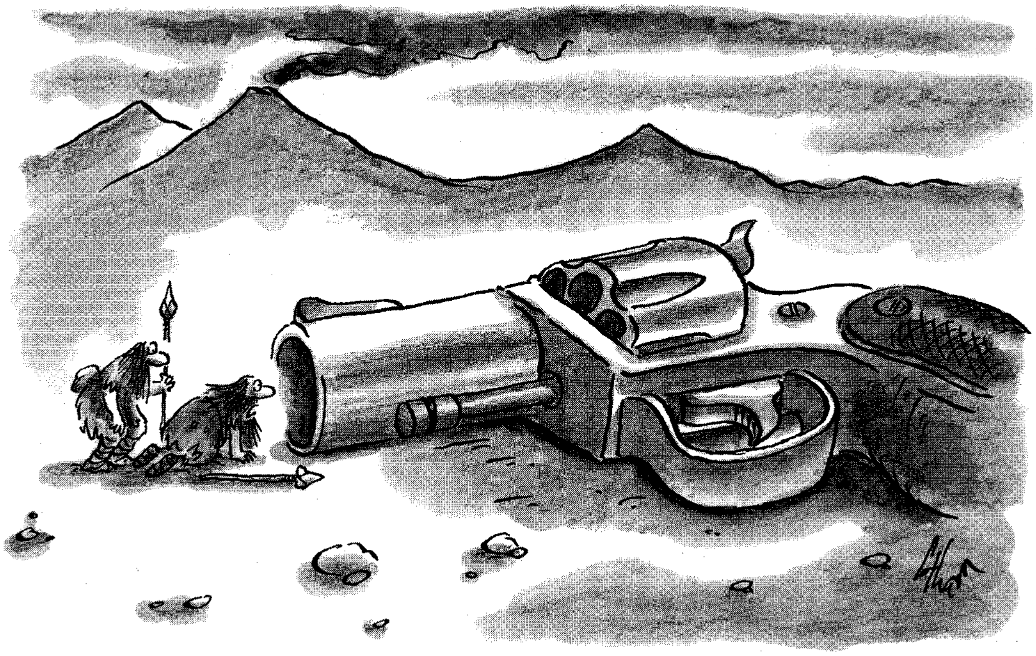
THE FINALISTS

"I wish I had those knees."
Art Berg, Reading, Mass.

"I hear he's got one-hundred-per-cent coverage—parts and labor."
Barbra Holian, Juneau, Alaska

"Dibs on his left hip!"
Tim Jegla, La Jolla, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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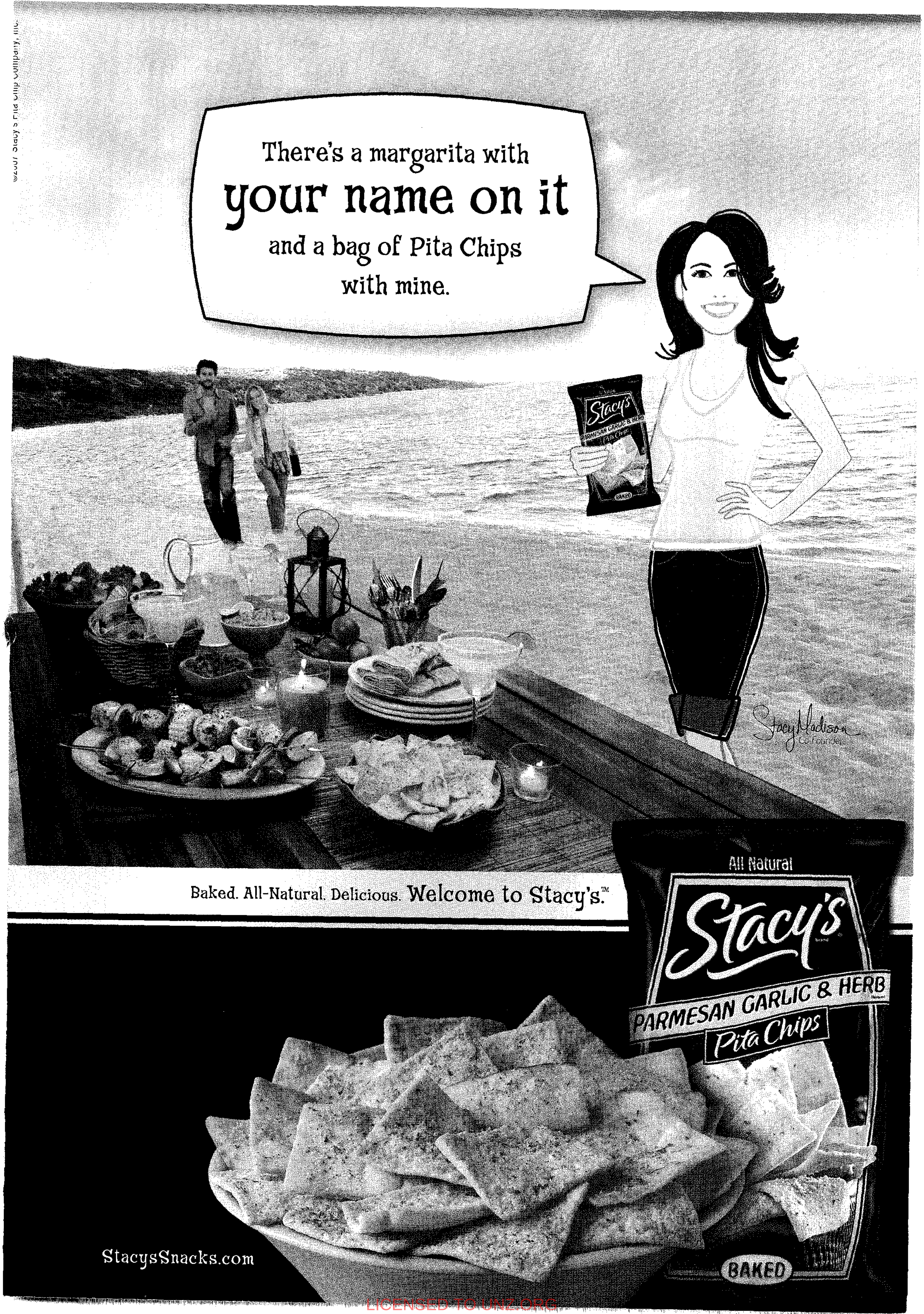

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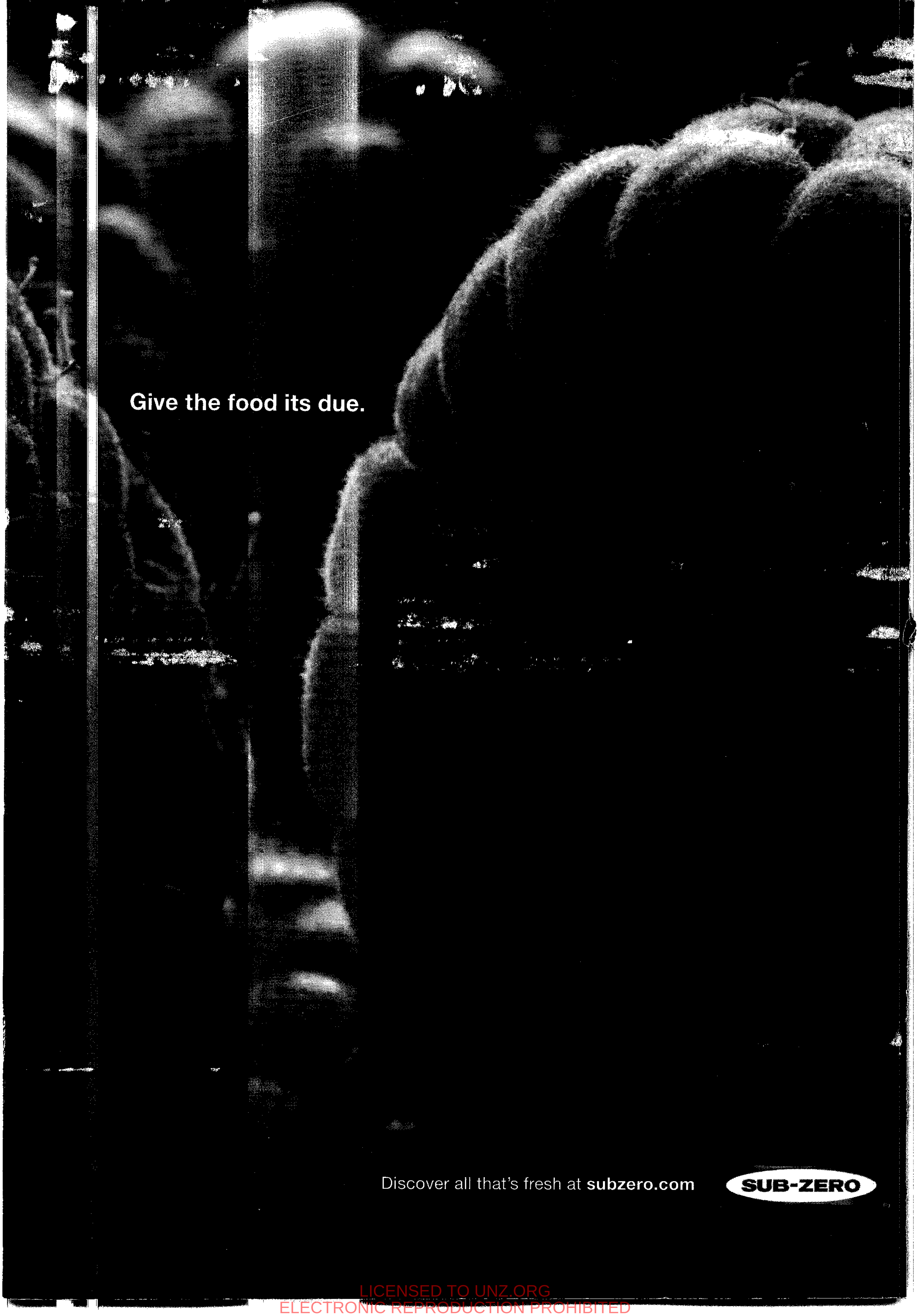
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